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Cen

Vietnamese · Studies

N° 24

*A Century of
National Struggle
(1847—1945)*

Editor: Nguyen Khac Vien

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CHRONOLOGY

Contributors to this issue: Tam Vu and
Nguyen Khac Vien

THIS year, 1970, the Vietnamese people celebrate the 40th founding anniversary of the Indochinese Communist Party (now the Viet Nam Workers' Party) and the 25th founding anniversary of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

The significance of these two events—the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930 and that of the DRVN in 1945 — can only be grasped in the light of the history of the Vietnamese national movement. As soon as the French colonialists launched their first armed attack on Viet Nam in 1847, the Vietnamese people, heir to a long tradition of patriotic struggle, started fighting the invader. However, they were able to regain their independence only after the leadership of the national movement had been taken over by the party of the working class, a Marxist-Leninist party.

To bring out the meaning of this extremely important fact, we shall give in this issue an outline history of the Vietnamese national movement since the beginning of colonial aggression. Only by putting the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party and that of the DRVN in that context can one understand them properly.

This brief history of the national movement does not claim to be exhaustive. It is merely a summing up of essential facts necessary to an understanding of Viet Nam's contemporary history.

THE LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE

○ ON April 15, 1847, French warships sank five armoured junks of the Vietnamese fleet in Da Nang port. On August 31, 1858, a French squadron attacked Da Nang again, thus marking the beginning of a war of colonial conquest by French imperialism, to be waged in many stages from 1858 to 1884, until the total annexation of the country. Facing that aggression, there were, on the Vietnamese side, two parties with opposite views : one standing for compromise, the other for resistance. The king and the high dignitaries of the Court were frightened by the modern weapons used by the French and misjudged the latter's intentions, believing that, coming from so far away, they were less interested in conquering the country than in wresting commercial advantages. Moreover, the Nguyen monarchy, retrograde to the core and constantly busy repressing internal insurrections, was neither able nor willing to mobilize all the energies of the nation to oppose the aggression. All these reasons urged the king and the high dignitaries to practise a policy of peace and negotiation, trying to placate the aggressors with more and more important concessions. On the other hand, a number of mandarins, the great majority of the scholars, and the people as a whole, heirs to a long tradition of struggle for national independence, put up a fierce resistance. While the royal troops offered only weak resistance, that of the popular forces was powerful and protracted, and

compelled French imperialism to wage a long and costly war. But the defection of the monarchy, the only force which could then play a guiding role on a national scale, undermined the efforts of the Vietnamese patriots.

The French colonialists used particularly cunning tactics. They began by gaining a foothold on a portion of the territory and having it ceded to them by the Court of Hue through a treaty in due form. The aggressors thus won a springboard to prepare for new annexations, and a respite to annihilate the people's resistance in the occupied zones. They then violated the treaty, and resumed the conquest. New concession by the Court, new treaty. New violation, new conquest. The same scenario recurred again and again until total annexation; from concession to concession the monarchy ended in capitulation and betrayal. The king and the high dignitaries preferred selling out national independence in exchange for a few privileges that the conquerors left them to win them over. Responsible for the safeguarding of national independence and honour, they gradually became agents of the foreigners and put themselves at the latter's service by repressing the people's patriotic movement. The support that the Court of Hue tried to obtain from the Chinese empire — itself on the decline and exposed to Western aggressions — could not deviate the course of events.

Loss of Saigon and the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina

After having occupied Da Nang, the French troops burnt it down, but were not strong enough to threaten the capital city and compel the Court of Hue to make concessions. Bishop Pellerin proposed to the French command to attack the Red River delta where 400,000 Catholics, he said, were ready to rise up in support of the operation. The French command, however, preferred taking its troops to the South, where rice trade was thriving.

Saigon was beleaguered on the morning of February 17, 1859; in the evening the royal troops evacuated it. Meanwhile, reinforcements were pouring in from the neighbouring provinces, among them 5,800 volunteers recruited by local notables. Thus reinforced, the Saigon garrison encircled the French troops who had entered the town, putting them in a difficult position. However, the Court of Hue did not order any counter-attack, hoping for a compromise by negotiation. The French took advantage of this indecision to gain time. In 1860, after a new victorious offensive of the Western powers against China, France was able to concentrate the whole of its naval force operating in the Far East to break the siege of Saigon and conquer, in 1861, the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina, which comprised, besides, three western provinces.

The defeat of the royal troops did not put an end to the Vietnamese resistance. Under the direction of patriotic leaders, the population everywhere rose up

against the French troops. The French officers who wrote the Military History of Indochina had to recognize that

"The defeats of the Annamese army had no effect on the insurrectional state of the occupied territories."

The resistance was general. The French historian Pallu de la Barrière, an eye-witness, wrote :

"The fact is that the resistance centre was everywhere, subdivided ad infinitum, nearly as many times as there were living Annamese. It would be more exact to consider each peasant who was fastening a sheaf of rice plants as a centre of resistance."

(History of the 1861
Cochinchina Expedition)

The popular character of the resistance was also seen in the change in tactics. Whereas the royal troops operated in close formations and greatly feared French long-range weapons, the popular forces practised guerilla warfare or surprise-attacks with close combat. The troops commanded by the patriot Nguyen Trung Truc, attacking at close quarters, succeeded in setting fire to a French warship, *l'Espérance*, and inflicting on the French a bitter defeat at Nhat Tao. The popular forces managed to re-occupy many localities, and the French command had to ask for quick reinforcements.

It was the Court of Hue which got the French troops out of this fix by asking for negotiation. On June 5, 1862, Phan Thanh Gian negotiated with French admiral Bonard a treaty by which the Court of Hue ceded to France the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina,

consented to pay an indemnity of 20 million francs and open three ports of Annam and Tonkin to French trade. The Court immediately ordered the popular forces to withdraw from the aforesaid provinces.

The order was not obeyed. The French historian F. Vial wrote :

"At the very moment the admiral thought he had brought the war to a victorious end, he found that it had become perhaps even more active and redoubtable than a serious war against the King's regular troops."

(The First Years
of French Cochinchina)

The insurrection was led by Truong Dinh, who was head of an agricultural settlement when the French attacked Saigon. Together with volunteers he came to the rescue of the town. After its fall he withdrew to "Go Cong province where he recruited a 6,000-strong army, and was appointed deputy-commander by the Court. After the signing of the 1862 treaty, the king ordered him to retire to An Giang province and give up the resistance (appointing him commander). Truong Dinh hesitated for a long time. A sincere patriot, he did not want to renounce the struggle, but, brought up as a Confucian, he did not feel he could disobey the king. He was about to obey the latter's order, when delegates of the popular forces and the people flocked to his camp and besought him to remain leader of the movement, dubbing him "Commander-in-Chief, Pacifier of the French." Truong

Dinh complied with the people's will and took command of the insurrection.

The patriotic resisters fought heroically.

"The Annamese, armed with weapons ineffective against our carbines, rushed at our men with a blind energy that testified to a rare courage and extraordinary abnegation."

(F. Vial, op. cit.)

Their guerilla tactics put the French troops to a hard test. Pallu de la Barrière wrote:

"There is no more painful, dull and tiring sight than that of the French moving over land and water. One of the adversaries is continually in sight, the other never. As the enemy persistently slips away, it seems as though we were hitting only a vacuum."

(op. cit.)

Civil resistance was also organized in all forms. The majority of notables and mandarins refused to collaborate with the enemy. The poet Nguyen Dinh Chieu, though a blind man, left the occupied regions and, together with other scholars, wrote highly patriotic works.

However, the order coming from the Court to stop all resistance sowed confusion in the people's minds. It had sent to France a mission led by Phan Thanh Gian to negotiate the retrocession of the lost provinces. France then, entangled in the Mexican war, gave some promises. On August 20, 1864, Truong Dinh, wounded during an engagement, committed suicide in order not to fall into the enemy's hands.

His son Truong Quyen continued the resistance. Meanwhile, in 1863, France had imposed a treaty of protectorate upon the king of Cambodia. Cambodian patriots, led by the bonze Pokumpo, then joined forces with the Vietnamese insurgents against the French.

In 1867, France, having settled the Mexican affair, switched to the offensive in Viet Nam. French troops marched on the three western provinces of Cochinchina. Judging all resistance to be hopeless, Phan Thanh Gian, the governor of these provinces, ceded them to the French, then committed suicide. Popular resistance in the western provinces brought together Vietnamese, Khmers and other nationalities—Cham, Mnong, Stieng—and covered a vast territory extending from the Cambodian Great Lakes to the vicinity of Saigon. From 1866 to 1868, fierce fighting occurred in Tay Ninh province, and Khmer insurgents came very close to Udong, the capital. Unfortunately Pokumpo was killed and the resistance in northwestern Cochinchina and the Cambodian border areas gradually died down. In the west of the Mekong delta two of Phan Thanh Gian's sons took the lead of the popular movement, while the patriot Nguyen Trung Truc, who had set fire to the frigate *l'Espérance* in 1861, conducted the operations. On June 16, 1868, in particular, he seized the Kien Giang post in Rach Gia province. Captured some time later, he refused to submit, and, facing the firing squad, cried out:

"As long as grass grows on our soil, there will be men to resist the invaders."

After the occupation of Cochinchina the French hastened to explore the Mekong river in the hope of draining all the trade of South China towards Saigon. This was soon proved impracticable.

**The embarrassing plight
of the Court of Hue.
The fall of Hanoi**

The loss of Cochinchina caused great concern in Viet Nam. Many patriots sent petitions to King Tu Duc advocating reforms apt to strengthen the defence potential of the country. Nguyen Truong To in particular recommended reforms in all fields: political, administrative, agricultural, commercial, industrial, educational, financial, diplomatic and military. Many urged that the country be opened to international trade, handicrafts renovated, industry and trade developed, the educational system changed, students sent abroad, and the army re-organized along Western lines.

The Court, stuck in its conservatism, refused to take those recommendations into consideration. Ignorant of the international situation, it did not know how to capitalize the difficulties encountered by France and wrest back the initiative of operations. With its policy of "peace and negotiation" it was still hoping to come to terms with the aggressor, and also counted on the support of the Manchu Tsing dynasty, then reigning in China.

The deep reason for this conservatism and weakness lay in the fact that the reactionary feudal

regime of the Nguyen was facing many popular uprisings. In 1862, near Hanoi, Cai Vang led a movement of protest against waste by the administration; in 1866 the workers and labourers employed in the construction of Tu Duc's tomb revolted. The French missionaries took advantage of this instability to foment unrest within Catholic communities in the Red River delta. This turmoil came to a head with Le Bao Hung's open rebellion.

Another difficulty was the penetration into Viet Nam from China of Taiping bands pursued by Tsing troops. Taking refuge in Upper Tonkin, these bands, known as White, Yellow and Black Flags carved out fiefs for themselves. Only the Black Flags led by Luu Vinh Phuc submitted to the authority of the Court of Hue.

Thanks to the Catholic missionaries, the French command was well aware of this situation. The impossibility to reach Southwest China by the Mekong led the French to demand the opening of the Red River and the ports of Tonkin, if need be by force. In 1872, without asking for the permission of the Vietnamese authorities, hundreds of mercenaries headed by the French adventurer Dupuis sailed up the Red River towards Yunnan, carrying weapons for the Chinese general Ma. On his first trip, the mandarins showed conciliation, but on his second passage Dupuis was blocked.

The pretext which the French command had been looking for was immediately exploited. Lieutenant-commander Francis Garnier was at once sent to Hanoi

with an armed escort, and soon got in touch with Bishop Puginier, who gathered the routed partisans of the rebel Le Bao Hung. On his own authority, Francis Garnier decreed that henceforth sailing on the Red River was free and customs duties abolished. The Vietnamese authorities refused to comply with this dictate. On November 19, 1873, the French opened fire and seized Hanoi. The old general Nguyen Tri Phuong, defender of Hanoi, wounded and captured, rebuffed all advances by the French, and let himself die of starvation. The French troops rapidly seized Nam Dinh, Hai Duong and other localities in the delta, thanks to the complicity of some Catholic communities. But the Vietnamese forces counter-attacked and encircled Hanoi, and Garnier was killed on December 21, 1873, in an ambush in the vicinity of the town.

Still suffering from the effects of the 1870 French-German war, France stood in dread of committing herself too deeply. King Tu Duc, faithful to his policy of compromise, failed to exploit a favourable military situation; he signed with the French the 1874 treaty, by which France returned the conquered towns but obtained permission to garrison troops in Hanoi and Haiphong, as well as the opening of the Red River for trade.

The capitulation of the monarchy and the setting up of the colonial regime

In the last two decades of the 19th century, the Western capitalist economy rapidly developed, the

European powers swooped on the other continents, and carried out a partition of the world. France's colonial policy, at times hesitant, began to be conducted in a more energetic and systematic way. The conquest of Burma by Britain speeded up the execution of French plans against Viet Nam.

Violating the 1874 treaty, in 1882 France sent to Tonkin new military units under the command of Henri Rivière. Declaring himself threatened by the "bellicose preparations" of the Vietnamese, he sent an ultimatum to the governor of Hanoi, demanding the destruction of the defence works, and the evacuation of the Vietnamese forces from the town. On April 25, 1882, the French troops attacked and seized Hanoi. Governor Hoang Dieu committed suicide. The mandarins in Tonkin wanted to counter-attack, but King Tu Duc still believed he could recover Hanoi through negotiation. Meanwhile, the French occupied the coal districts of Hon Gai and Cam Pha, then Nam Dinh. Tu Duc, who had little confidence in his own troops, called for help from the Court of Peking. The latter dispatched 10,000 men who came and camped northeast of Hanoi, but did not move any further.

As in 1873, the Vietnamese forces, encircling Hanoi, defeated the French troops in a battle near the town, killing Henri Rivière right at the place where Francis Garnier had died. Paris dispatched 4,000 reinforcement troops, but Tu Duc kept sounding out France for negotiations, and dismissed those mandarins who advocated armed struggle.

In July 1883, Tu Duc died without leaving an heir. In Huê, clans and factions scrambled for power. Within a few months, three kings were successively enthroned, while the high dignitaries were divided over what policy to adopt towards France. Some were partisans of armed resistance, others of negotiation, some openly planned betrayal and collaboration with the aggressors. The Court was not even aware of the military successes recorded in Tonkin by the Vietnamese forces.

Turning to account this confusion, the French command concentrated troops to seize Da Nang and march on Huê. As soon as they heard the boom of French artillery coming from the Thuan An pass which defended the access to the capital city, the mandarins hurriedly accepted all the conditions imposed by the French. Viet Nam, losing her sovereignty, became a French protectorate (August 25, 1883). The mandarins split into two groups. Many disobeyed the Court and resigned their posts so as to continue the resistance, while the remainder, bowing their heads, put themselves at the service of the French.

There remained the Tsing troops, sent by the Peking Court which, seriously weakened, did not want a confrontation with France ; Paris and Peking signed the Tientsin treaty (May 11, 1884). Regents Ton That Thuyet and Nguyen Van Tuong, hostile to the 1883 accord, had to resign themselves to ratifying the treaty of protectorate in June 1884. However, as the Tsing troops withdrew through the Lang Son pass, they clashed at Bac Le with French troops, who were defeated. The French command launched a big attack

on China, landed troops on Taiwan (Formosa), and bombarded Foochow port. The Vietnamese forces, co-operating with the Tsing, inflicted another defeat on the French at Lang Son in February 1885.

But the Peking Court did not at all want to prolong the hostilities, and signed with France a new treaty (June 9, 1885) by which it renounced all its rights in Viet Nam.

The Can Vuong movement and the popular struggle

Even after the 1883 capitulation, the partisans of resistance headed by Regent Ton That Thuyet continued to be active at the Court, while in the country, the entire population and the scholars got organized to continue the struggle. The regent ordered the construction in Quang Tri province of the Tan So fort where he had the royal treasure transferred. In July 1884, a twelve-year-old king, Ham Nghi, was enthroned. France tried to impose a new treaty by which Viet Nam was to be divided into three zones: Cochinchina, a colony; Tonkin, half-colony and half-protectorate; and Annam, a protectorate. The unity of the country was profoundly impaired.

In the meantime, popular resistance in Tonkin remained vigorous. The French command wanted to strike at Huê itself to deprive the movement of its leaders through the dismissal of the high dignitaries partisans of the resistance and in particular of Regent Thuyet. It demanded that the Court should hand

over its cannons, reduce its armed forces, replace the royal council by a new one composed of pro-French mandarins. In June 1885, French General de Courcy landed at Huê and demanded the disbandment of the Vietnamese troops. Regent Thuyet and the mandarin Tran Xuan Soan reacted by ordering an attack on the French positions on the night of July 4. After a bloody battle the French troops seized the capital city.

But King Ham Nghi together with the Court took to the hills, where he issued a proclamation calling on the entire population to support the monarchy in struggle (*Can Vuong*). The mandarins who had been dismissed for their stand in favour of the resistance were reinstated, and everywhere in the country, the people and scholars warmly answered the appeal. However, the defeatist faction of the Court came back to Huê where, in collusion with the French, they enthroned a new king, Dong Khanh, on September 19, 1885.

The main base held by Ham Nghi was the mountainous part of Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces, linked to the north by a road communicating with Laos. Early in 1886, as popular resistance in Tonkin intensified, the French command was obliged to concentrate troops there. The Vietnamese resistance in Quang Binh expanded towards the sea and along the rivers flowing from the Truong Son Range. However, the Vietnamese patriots were soon short of weapons and were gradually driven deeper into the mountain regions of Quang Binh, thinly populated and barren.

Thuyet had gone to China to ask for help ; Ham Nghi failed to move his HQ to the north, where the resistance base was larger and more populated. The French carried out a methodical encirclement of the retreat of Ham Nghi, who was betrayed by a Muong chief, captured on November 1, 1888, and exiled to Algeria.

Ham Nghi's appeal had caused a mobilization of important forces in many regions, from north to south. In the southern provinces of Annam, the patriot Mai Xuan Thuong led the resistance movement until he was captured and executed in 1888. In Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Thanh Hoa provinces the resistance was particularly vigorous. There, well-known scholars called on the population to rise up, recruited volunteers, and organized armed forces with courageous and resolute men of the labouring classes.

In Thanh Hoa, patriots led by Dinh Cong Trang had built the Ba Dinh fortress in the middle of a swampy region. Cleverly camouflaged, Ba Dinh from afar looked like a simple village ; in reality it was surrounded by high ramparts and a deep moat ; on the ramparts were thousands of earth-filled baskets which left between them loopholes through which the defenders could watch and fire at the assailants. A thick belt of bamboos protected the fortress and the surrounding areas were planted with sharp stakes. Trenches were dug inside. Masson, a French officer who participated in the attack, wrote :

" Reconnaissance inside Ba Dinh gave us quite a surprise by showing how skilfully the fortifications

were built. Supplies were abundant and discipline strict. Two theatrical troupes gave performances for the fighters. In the mountain region of Thanh Hoa, a retreat position, Ma Cao, had been built in anticipation of the fall of Ba Dinh."

From September 1886 to January 1887, many French attacks were repelled. The French command had to dispatch there 2,500 more men with a powerful artillery on four gun-boats. The missionaries mobilized the Catholics of Phat Diem to help supply the troops. Whereas the Hanoi citadel defended by the royal troops had held out only one day in face of a much smaller French force, the Ba Dinh garrison resisted 35 days in spite of French artillery. The French officers had to pay tribute to the bravery of the defenders. Masson wrote:

"Another prisoner closely questioned calmly answered: 'You are wasting your time trying to ask us for information we don't want to give you, for we consider it prejudicial to the interests of our country. Do what you will with us...'. These facts, among the hundreds we have witnessed, suffice to give an idea of the character of the Annamese race, and if we have only quoted the mandarins we can add that the ordinary people and the simple soldiers are their equals in bravery and contempt of death."

In the Red River delta, the French had to launch repeated mopping-up operations against many insurrectional centres, particularly against the Bai Say resistance base commanded by Nguyen Thien Thuat.

Here, the patriots did not build fortresses but carried on an active guerilla war, sometimes also fighting great engagements with the support of the population. Such was the case in all provinces. The "pirates" were none other than the peasants rising up against the occupier. Here is a letter from the French administrator resident of Bac Ninh, written in 1886:

"A strong gang of pirates has just attacked the Yen Son post, thanks to the complicity of the Yen Son villagers. No one had warned us of their arrival and they went away without pillaging the local population."

It was the same courage and skill everywhere. The French and their lackeys had to build a close network of posts, and launch repeated raids. Only at that price was the Bai Say region temporarily pacified by 1889.

In the mountain regions of Tonkin, the French only succeeded in occupying some main highways and strategic points. The country was entirely controlled by the local chiefs, who co-operated with the insurgents of the delta in harassing the French troops. In the North-West, the delegate of Ham Nghi, Nguyen Quang Bich, conducted the operations together with the chiefs of local ethnic groups. To compel him to surrender, the French and their valets arrested his old mother, but neither the son nor the mother submitted. Only by the end of 1888 were French columns able to reach Lao Cai, Nghia Lo and Dien Bien Phu.

In the North-East the French held very loose control over the Hanoi-Lang Son road; on the coast, the

frontier town of Mong Cai, recaptured by the patriots in 1885, was definitively occupied by the French only in 1886. In Viet Bac, the French were hardly able to venture out of the towns of Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang, which they had occupied since 1884.

This patriotic and popular resistance stirred up by Ham Nghi's appeal, unlike that of the royal troops, caused enormous difficulties to the French troops, inflicted heavy losses on them, and gave rise in France itself to vigorous reactions in public opinion and in Parliament. At certain moments, under the pressure of public opinion the French Parliament had to cut down credits intended for the conquest of Viet Nam; however, the colonialist clan eventually got the upper hand.

Second phase of the resistance

The capture of Ham Nghi did not put an end to the people's patriotic movement. Loyalty to the king was only the manifestation of a profound patriotism ingrained in the people's and the scholars' minds. Many uprisings continued to break out in various provinces till 1897.

In Thanh Hoa, the scholar Tong Duy Tan, allied with the Muong, pursued the struggle after the fall of Ba Dinh until 1892, when he was captured. Put in a cage by the enemy, he used the handle of his brush to rip up his belly and take his own life. His Muong lieutenant, Cam Ba Thuoc, continued the struggle until 1895.

In Ha Tinh, the scholar Phan Dinh Phung and his principal lieutenant Cao Thang organized a strong

resistance base in the region of Huong Khe and the sphere of action of the insurgents covered the four provinces of Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Thanh Hoa. Sprung from the common people, Cao Thang was a great military chief who knew how to organize his forces efficaciously and succeeded in equipping them with home-made guns modelled after the 1874 French rifle. The movement began in 1885. In 1893, at the head of his men he marched on the provincial capital of Nghe An and seized many posts. His death in combat, at the age of 29, cast a damp over the insurrection. The French and their lackeys had to mobilize as many as 5,000 men to clear up the region. In 1896, Phan Dinh Phung died of dysentery and the movement gradually came to an end.

From 1889 to 1893, in the valley of the Da River (Black River) and the upper valley of the Red River, after the death of Nguyen Quang Bich and the desertion of the Thai chief Deo Van Tri, who crossed over to the French side, the leadership of the movement passed into the hands of De Kieu and Doc Ngu.

Of all the movements of struggle which went on after the capture of Ham Nghi, the most remarkable was unquestionably that of Yen The, begun in 1885; in this mountainous region on the edge of the Red River delta, the peasants rose up against the colonialists who had robbed them of their lands. They were joined by insurgents coming from the delta, and the leader of the movement, Hoang Hoa Tham (De Tham) gave it a vigorous impetus by skilfully waging a protracted guerilla war. His regular forces numbered

only a few hundred, the main force being composed of peasants who worked the land and fought the aggressors when the need arose.

From its base in Yen The, the movement spread to the provinces of Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Thai Nguyen and Lang Son. Many French operations against Yen The failed. Frey, a French officer, wrote :

"One cannot understand how those men, gathered in a narrow area, crushed by the fire of four artillery pieces firing from a distance of 300 metres, could hold out so long ... If the enemy has not the fanaticism of a Kabyle or a guerilla of the Sudan, he has a keener intelligence, and a remarkable power of assimilation in the use of our means of action and tactical methods. He shows great skill in choosing his positions and fortifying them, and the same indifference, the same impassivity when facing death... The insurgents are commanded by true chiefs... and fight at very close quarters to kill a great number of their adversaries."

In 1894, the French proposed a truce, yielding the administration of four cantons to De Tham. In 1895, they broke it, and unexpectedly attacked Yen The, but the patriot was on his guard; his scattered troops led a deadly guerilla war against the French. In 1897, the latter again negotiated a truce. By that time, nothing remained to the insurgents but the Yen The base, the other movements of resistance having been successively crushed.

In the mountain regions inhabited by many national minorities the population resisted for a long time :

but the French knew how to stir up and exploit dissensions between them and win over the local chiefs. After having conquered some strongholds the French command applied itself to hatching schemes of political division before launching new operations. Little by little the various movements of resistance were defeated and the mountain regions came under French control.

From 1861 to 1897, contrary to the royal army, which literally collapsed under French attacks, the popular resistance, waged with the participation of the population, organized by valiant chiefs and using varied forms of combat, carried out a nation-wide and protracted struggle. However, the defection of the monarchy deprived it of all possibility for united action on a national scale. A monarchy knowing how to rely on the people would certainly have resisted the aggression successfully.

II

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLONIAL REGIME

(1897 — 1918)

○ WING to popular resistance the war of conquest waged by the French colonialists dragged on until 1896; only then could the colonial regime be truly established, the people's armed struggle having been temporarily stifled — the sole notable insurrectional centre left was the region of Yen The held by De Tham. The appointment of Paul Doumer as Governor General of Indochina marked the will of French imperialism to set up a classical colonial regime with all its components — economic, political, administrative, military and cultural.

Political and administrative organization

The first concern of the conquerors was to establish a stable and efficient political and administrative organization. In Cochinchina, occupied since 1862, the French were faced with systematic non-collaboration on the part of the mandarins and scholars. Wrote the French historian Cultru :

"... and if, by some sort of miracle, the scholars had sided with the French and betrayed their sovereign, the administration of Cochinchina would have been mere child's play for us. However, the educated Annamese, the elite loyal to their country, could but regard us as their enemy; the peasants bound to their fields and their cattle stayed in the country in a state of apparent submission which did not at all imply moral submission."

The French had to resort to direct administration, by recruiting native subaltern agents with neither culture nor prestige, to serve as intermediaries; moreover, all their attempts at enticement having failed owing to the permanent insubordination of the population, they shamelessly resorted to the most violent and cruel repressive measures. To the end, the colonial administration was to be marked by this double taint: on the one hand, its cruelty, and on the other, its collusion with the most retrograde and corrupt elements of the Vietnamese nation. American neo-colonialism in South Viet Nam only magnifies in the extreme these evil features inherent in all colonial enterprises.

As early as 1866, a report by Resident Muselier to the Resident-Superior of Tonkin already admitted:

"... the native mandarins hesitated to rally to us or at least to serve us without ulterior motive, and gave up their jobs, preferring retirement, while a few others, more energetic, became real, political, chiefs of the rebellion. One found in administrative functions only a few ambitious and forward-looking mandarins, the rest being intriguers, disreputable characters or ignorant men that events had brought to our side and whom we had sometimes invested with high honours which became tools in their hands to fleece the country unscrupulously and bring shame upon our intervention. Upstarts without merit and promoted in contravention of all rules of hierarchy, they enjoyed no prestige..."

Vice-admiral Rieunier also complained, "We have only scoundrels on our side."

To get a base of support, the colonial administration entered into direct collusion with the feudalists, at least with the most reactionary elements of this class. The feudal regime was not abolished but reinforced, the king, the mandarins and the notables becoming the auxiliaries of the French administrators, while the landowners continued to exploit the peasants at will.

Viet Nam was divided into three different "countries" with different administrative regimes: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, each being separately integrated into French Indochina, which also included Cambodia and Laos, and was headed by a French governor-general. The aim, it was evident, was to break the unity of the Vietnamese nation in order to subjugate it more easily.

Each of the five Indochinese "countries" (Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia and Laos) had a French resident-superior and each province was administered by a French resident. All the important services—security, finance, public works, post, agriculture, public health, trade—were in French hands. The governor-general administered the whole of Indochina with the help of a Superior Council of Indochina which gathered around him the residents-superior and French directors of the most important services.

The Vietnamese administrations were maintained only for form's sake or charged with menial jobs. The council of Vietnamese ministers was presided over by the French resident-superior and each minister had a

French adviser. The resident-superior also headed the council of the royal family. In 1899, the French administration took away from the royal administration the right to levy taxes and pay its functionaries. In Tonkin and Annam, at the provincial level, there subsisted besides the residency a Vietnamese administration whose members were mere puppets. The residents-superior were helped by "elected councils" carefully selected among a tiny group of landowners, wealthy merchants or industrialists and high functionaries to serve as a mere adornment for the colonial administration.

The administration set up by Doumer was to undergo no great alteration until the end of the colonial regime.

This administration could not subsist but for a constant military protection; after 1896, sporadic uprisings still broke out which testified to the permanence of the national movement. Around a nucleus of French and African troops and elements of the Foreign Legion, the French organized a "native militia" at the provincial level. The Vietnamese royal guard only served for parades. The "native militia" was mainly entrusted with "pacification" tasks, which did not prevent the militiamen from turning their weapons on many occasions against their French officers and siding with national movements.

Educational and cultural organizations

On the cultural plane, the colonial administration strove less to raise the level of instruction of the

population than to create on the one hand subaltern agents for the administrative apparatus and on the other to form a "denationalized" intelligentsia, without any contact with the national culture and any spirit of independence on the cultural plane.

At one time, before Doumer, the first governors had thought of using traditional education as a tool at their service. Doumer maintained the regime of mandarin examinations until 1915 in Tonkin and 1918 in Annam. Starting in 1862, the *quoc ngu*, a latinized transcription of the Vietnamese language, was used in Cochinchina then gradually in the whole country. In 1896, the colonial administration introduced it into some tests of the mandarin examinations, and in 1903, a test on the French language also became compulsory.

For traditional education was substituted little by little a so-called Franco-Vietnamese education especially aimed at recruiting a few workers and subaltern functionaries for the colonial regime. Some professional schools were set up and in 1901 a Medical School opened to train auxiliary physicians (health officers). At all levels, it was a third-rate education. Even the Indochinese University, opened in 1908, dispensed a truncated and deformed education. French was the teaching medium, the study of the national language and history was reduced to a minimum. School and college students learnt by heart that "our ancestors were the Gauls", and disserted all day long on Racine or Chateaubriand without ever seriously tackling the study of Vietnamese culture. Even French authors of the 18th century such as Montesquieu and Rousseau

were prohibited; there was neither Faculty of Sciences nor Engineering Schools at the Indochinese University.

The main feature of colonial education was its Malthusianism. The diffusion of instruction was restricted to the utmost. In traditional Viet Nam, despite all the hinderings of the feudal regime, the population, who craved for instruction, managed to set up classes for children in almost every village. The substitution of the colonial education for the traditional one provoked a sharp decrease in the number of schools and pupils, an extension of illiteracy. One of the most pressing demands of the Vietnamese people during the colonial period was the diffusion and the Vietnamization of education. Under this constant pressure the colonial administration was compelled to set up a few educational establishments. The university created in 1908 was mainly meant to keep in the country the youths who wanted to go and study in Japan. But never was there any important diffusion of education: 90 per cent of the children could not go to school. There never were more than three secondary schools for the whole of Viet Nam (the same number as for the children of the French, who totalled only a few score thousand). Thirty years after its founding, the university had an enrolment of only 600 students.

For a better survey of the resources of the country, the colonial administration set up a few research institutes by the end of the 19th century: Far Eastern French School, Pasteur Institute, Meteorological Office, Geological, Geographical, Forestry Services... In

a few domains some French researchers succeeded in doing interesting work, but these institutes were as a whole geared to serve colonial exploitation. Besides, Vietnamese were systematically kept away from research work.

One of the most important cultural elements was the substitution of the *quoc ngu* for the old ideographic script. The printing of newspapers and books in *quoc ngu* quickly forged ahead. The colonialists wanted to use it as a tool serving their own ends, but the *quoc ngu* rapidly became for the Vietnamese national movement a means to diffuse the ideas of independence and progress.

Taxes, excises and state monopolies

The maintenance of a huge, vexatious and oppressive colonial administration was a very heavy burden for the country. French functionaries and soldiers received very high salaries; the colonial administration was overstaffed with clients and protégés of French politicians and parties. As early as 1910, the number of French functionaries in Indochina amounted to 5,000, nearly that of their British counterparts in India.

Taxes were substantially increased; in 1897 capitation went from 0.50 piastre to 2.50 piastres, land tax from one piastre to 1.50 piastres. Revenue for the general budget came mainly from three state monopolies: alcohol, salt and opium.

The monopoly for making and selling alcohol was conceded in 1902 to a French firm (Fontaine) and the people were compelled to consume alcohol, a quota

being imposed on each village according to its population. All private distillation of alcohol was forbidden and severely sanctioned by prison terms, confiscation of property and even deportation. With a capital of 3.5 million francs, Fontaine annually reaped from 2 to 3 million francs' profit. A litre of alcohol, which cost from 5 to 6 cents, was sold 29 cents in 1906.

The administration bought all the salt from the salt-producers to resell it at an increasing profit: 0.50 piastre on every 100 kilos in 1897, 2 piastres in 1907; from 1889 to 1907 the price of salt went up five times.

The administration held the monopoly of buying and selling opium, the consumption of which was encouraged. From 1896 to 1899, the price of one kilo jumped from 45 to 77 piastres. When Doumer left Indochina, receipts from opium amounted to 15 million gold francs, twice as much as in 1897. In 1907 the administration listed 210,000 smokers, many times the pre-colonial number.

Revenue from these monopolies went up from 8 million piastres in 1899 to 10.4 million in 1903, 12 million in 1911, constituting an important part of the general budget (i.e. that under the governor-general) which jumped from 20 million in 1899 to 32 million in 1903 and 42 million in 1911. After Doumer's term of office, the Vietnamese people had to pay over 90 million gold francs in tax, nearly three times as much as in the past. Wrote Colonel Bernard in the *Revue de Paris* (October 1908):

"It is this inexorably heavier tax burden which has dominated the financial policy of Indochina these last eight or nine years."

The establishment of those monopolies was accompanied by a system of repression both odious and costly. At the least denunciation, excise agents searched houses, gardens and fields without any warrant and could arrest anyone they pleased. Crushed under the burden of taxes many families had to go even without salt, which had become an expensive luxury.

Colonial economic exploitation

In the last analysis, all this administrative, military, financial and cultural apparatus served the colonial economic system, the economic exploitation of the country for the benefit of French capitalist firms which had invested capital in Indochinese enterprises. The colony was to become an outlet for French industrial products and a supplier of raw materials and manpower at cheap prices. Hence the priority import of French industrial products which dangerously competed with traditional goods and ruined handicrafts, the refusal to set up a developed native industry, the concentration of French capital in sectors turning out immediately exportable products: coal, ores, rubber ... the recourse to every means to prevent the birth of a Vietnamese capitalist industry. A customs barrier ensured to French products a quasi-monopoly of the Indochinese market. Moreover, in opposition to the heavy tax burden weighing on the Vietnamese, the French societies were subjected to a very light taxation and enjoyed exemptions, subsidies, and profitable contracts with the administration—all this of course being covered by the taxes levied on the Vietnamese.

As early as 1897, a decree allotted particularly advantageous mining concessions to French companies; and by the beginning of this century, together with coal (in Quang Yen), tin, gold, wolfram and antimony were exploited. Most of the products were exported. Processing industries were little developed, for fear of competition with French products. In the early years of this century, in Cochinchina a number of husking mills were built to serve export, which came to handle hundreds of thousands of tons of rice. Various companies were set up in Tonkin: cotton-threading and weaving - mill in 1900, a company of water and electricity in 1900, a brewery in 1901, a company for forest exploitation and match-manufacturing in 1909, brick-kilns, then a cement-plant in Hai phong, a paper mill in Dap cau, a cigarette-factory in Hanoi. In Annam, the French invested much less; there were saw-mills and match-factories in Vinh and Thanh Hoa, a lime-kiln in Huê and a silk-weaving mill in Phu Phong.

All these industries turned out only a small quantity of products, their profits accruing from low wages rather than from increased production. As the profits were transferred to France, Viet Nam suffered a constant financial deficit aggravated by the repatriation of French functionaries' savings.

In agriculture, the administration favoured the appropriation by French colonists and societies of rich and thinly-populated lands. In the midlands of Tonkin, whole villages were evacuated during military operations and their lands grabbed; in

the Tay Nguyen highlands, vast tracts of land were allotted to colonists or societies; in Cochinchina, as a result of drainage work in the Mekong delta, vast domains were awarded to French colonists or Vietnamese agents of the colonial administration. Thus, from 1897 to 1913 French colonists and societies grabbed 470,000 hectares, including 306,000 in Cochinchina, without mentioning 90,000 hectares conceded to a society for forest exploitation. Before 1918, nearly all the concessions to the French colonists were planted with rice because Indochina, particularly Cochinchina, had to supply an increasing quota of this cereal; 800,000 tons in 1900, 1,200,000 in 1920.

However, no technical innovation was brought to traditional rice-farming, whose yield remained one of the lowest in the world—1.2 tons per hectare on the average. The colonists only thought of intensifying the exploitation of the Vietnamese peasants' labour and the export of rice continued at an implacable rate even when famine was rampant.

In trade, French goods dominated the market, being exonerated from all customs duties. They were sold at high prices while Vietnamese products were exported at low prices. From 1892 to 1913 exports went up from 26 to 102 million piastres, imports from 19 to 110 million. The profits of foreign trade went for the most part to a few big companies: l'UCIA, Denis Frères...

To serve its economic and strategic ends, the colonial administration, particularly under Doumer, gave a fillip to the development of communication

means. Single-tracked narrow-gauge railways were built from Hanoi to Lang Son in 1902, from Hanoi to Vinh in 1905, from Huê to Da Nang in 1906, from Saigon to Nha Trang in 1919, from Hanoi to Yunnan-fou in 1919. In Cochinchina, many canals were dug to increase the acreage of ricefields and facilitate the export of rice. The first years of the century saw the biggest development of communication lines during the whole colonial regime.

CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF VIETNAMESE SOCIETY AND NEW FORMS TAKEN BY THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The establishment of the colonial regime gradually and profoundly changed the structure of traditional society, new social classes appeared and new ideas penetrated into people's minds while misery was aggravated owing to colonial exploitation and the many burdens imposed by the occupier.

Pauperization of the peasantry

Owing to protracted military operations, the countryside was heavily devastated, a number of villages were completely razed. Land grabbing by the colonists, and by mandarins and notables who had put themselves at the service of the French, the proliferation of taxes, the alcohol and salt monopolies with the attendant vexations and exactions, and the ruin of handicrafts considerably aggravated the peasants'

misery. The colonial administration was more concerned with the building of railways and roads of strategic importance or serving colonial enterprises than with the construction of hydraulic works to protect the crops from natural calamities. Drought and floods further worsened the fate of the peasantry, who lived in permanent want punctuated with periodical famines. The dykes received some attention only after many catastrophic floods. •

While bearing all the burdens of the colonial regime, the peasants did not receive the slightest benefit: they were too poor to buy French industrial goods and nobody taught them the new agricultural techniques likely to better their production. Moreover, they were subjected to the unbridled brutality of the administration's agents.

Far from being impeded by the colonial regime, feudal exploitation and oppression was reinforced. Little by little land-owners and notables became the best agents of the colonial administration for maintaining "order" and collecting taxes in the countryside. The interpreters, servants, security agents of the French were allotted land, thus forming a new stratum of land-owners. The concentration of land holdings increased.

A few years of colonial domination sufficed to decrease per capita rice consumption: from 262 kilograms in 1900 it went down to 226 kilograms in 1913. A French observer remarked at the beginning of this century:

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"Those who toured Indochina were struck by the utter misery of her inhabitants. Most of the dwellings were mere huts built of wood or mud and covered with straw. Yellow or red bands or paper bearing Chinese script hung on the walls, a few implements made of wood, sometimes of brass, remains of a lost prosperity, adorn the ancestors' altar."

(Indochina, Errors and Dangers by Colonel Bernard).

The peasants' lot, already bad enough under the feudal regime, grew even worse.

Working class, bourgeoisie, new intelligentsia

The setting up of colonial industrial and commercial enterprises, the building of railways and other communication means resulted in the birth of a new social class, the working class. Without having the numerical importance of its European counterpart, the Vietnamese working class none the less had a most important role to play, for it was born before the national bourgeoisie and its fate was closely linked to that of colonization. Right at its birth, it entered into direct contact with hard colonial realities in the mines, construction sites, factories: starvation wages, exhausting work without any limit or guarantee, brutalities.

For public works, the building of roads and railways, in particular, the colonial administration requisitioned peasants in all villages. Turned "coolies" on the construction sites, they worked in infernal conditions. Jean Ajalbert, a French author, reported:

"Resiquisition becomes ill-disguised deportation... The public works services drive whole communities to construction sites, from which only a small part will return. In 1901, I travelled in the Lang Biang region, where I stayed for several weeks. The public works services were represented by a captain of cuirassiers. The mortality rate was appalling. Rice supplies came only irregularly. There was one physician for a stretch of 120 kilometres."

For the building of the Hanoi-Yunnanfou railways 80,000 people were commandeered, of whom 25,000 lost their lives. One could not speak of class consciousness as yet, but right from the start, movements of struggle, opposition, and protest broke out on these construction sites.

On the other hand, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie came into being only later; in the early years of this century there were only some inchoate elements. Traditional Vietnamese society hampered the development of even a moderately important class of traders. For their commercial operations, the French preferred to deal with Chinese merchants. However, some agents of French companies managed to amass a fortune, thus forming the first core of the comprador bourgeoisie. But the Vietnamese bourgeois who tried to start a few enterprises were discouraged or driven to bankruptcy by the administration. The nascent Vietnamese bourgeoisie thus had to fall back on real estate and usury, and could only be a "rickety" bourgeoisie.

New towns appeared on the sites of old administrative centres (Hanoi, Nam Dinh) or ports (Saigon, Haiphong, Da Nang). There a new life burgeoned: more intense trading activities, a few factories, some newspapers, electric lighting. But the workers lived in deep, often appalling, misery. Moreover, only a tiny part of the population lived in the towns.

In these towns, the first French-trained intellectuals did not yet play any appreciable role. In Tonkin and in Annam in particular, the scholars still constituted the main body of the intelligentsia, but their prestige had considerably decreased. It became evident that the Confucian doctrine could no longer serve as a basis for the restoration of national independence and for social progress. Modernist scholars emerged who sought other ways for the national movement than those advocated by their predecessors.

Modernist scholars and national movement

By 1900, the armed struggle which had lasted from 1858 to 1898 had practically ceased; there remained one isolated resistance base in Yen The with Hoang Hoa Tham. But the resistance was carried on in new forms inspired by modern ideas, and varying with the means used by the colonialists for exploitation and oppression. Political struggle appeared in the towns while peasant demonstrations and workers' strikes were staged in support of clearly-stated economic and social claims.

The new social classes—working class and bourgeoisie—were in no position yet to lead the national movement which was still inspired by the scholars. However, the latter had acquainted themselves with new ideas. Neither the missionaries nor the soldiers of the West had brought with them new ideas of science and democracy, and, as we have seen above, the colonial administration had banned from school curriculums the literary and philosophical works of the French 18th century. The new ideas, the new works—those of Rousseau and Montesquieu in particular—had come to the Vietnamese scholars through Chinese translations. Under the brutal impact of Western aggressions, China had undergone a modernist movement towards the end of the 19th century. Noted scholars—Keng Yu-wei and Liang Chi-chao—had led a reform movement to regenerate Chinese traditional society. Then in the first decade of this century, the more revolutionary ideas of Sun Yat-sen dominated the Chinese political stage.

Influenced by these new ideas, Vietnamese patriotic scholars no longer contented themselves with advocating a struggle against aggression, for national independence, while preserving the old monarchic regime and Confucian ideology. They began to put forward programs of social and ideological reform. The scholars were divided into traditionalists and modernists. Of the latter some demanded reforms of the colonial regime, others advocated armed struggle to overthrow it.

In 1905, Japan's victory over tsarist Russia resounded like a clap of thunder throughout Asia. Thus

an Asian state, by renovating itself, was able to defeat an European power. Forgetting that Japan had turned capitalist and conquered Taiwan and Korea, the Vietnamese patriots felt for it a great admiration and cherished the hope that, as an Asian power, it would give them some help, if not effective support, in the struggle against French colonialism. Many a scholar or student tried to go and study in Japan; it was the *Dong Zu* (Go East) movement.

The prominent figure in the patriotic movement of the first two decades of this century was Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940). A famous scholar, after 1900 he began gathering the partisans of the Can Vuong movement, which had failed, to found a new organization, the *Zuy Tan* (Renovation), which advocated the reorganization of forces within the country coupled with the sending of men abroad to study knew military and political techniques, and the preparation for armed struggle. Phan Boi Chau thought he would ask for Japanese help. A member of the royal family, prince Cuong De, who was to lead an enlightened monarchy should the undertaking succeed, was sent to Japan to get in touch with the Japanese authorities. By 1908, about 200 young students had been dispatched there, most of them sons of scholars who had taken part in the national resistance. Fund collections were organized everywhere in the country to defray their studies.

Phan Boi Chau had failed to take account of Japanese duplicity. In 1900, in exchange for financial advantages, Japan recognized the French conquests

in Asia and expelled the Vietnamese patriots. A Vietnamese student committed suicide by disembowelment to protest against these measures. Phan Boi Chau and Cuong De had to take refuge in China then in Siam, while other *Zuy Tan* members fell into the hands of the French police.

In Viet Nam, the modernist scholars displayed great efforts for intellectual renovation. Thanks to collected funds, some scholars headed by Luong Van Can and Nguyen Quyen founded in Hanoi in March 1907 an association to give free instruction to the people, the *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* (Tonkin Study Institute). It enjoyed gratuitous help from many intellectuals and had a big enrolment rapidly running into thousands. Apart from regular courses teaching new subjects, public conferences gathered large and eager audiences coming to attend debates on economic and social problems or to listen to various papers. A group of scholars published a review, *Dang Co Tung Bao*, which advocated reforms, criticized obsolete customs and habits, castigated retrograde notables and called for industrial and commercial development. Books expressing similar views were also published. Frightened by the successes recorded by the movement, the colonial administration closed the Institute, arrested and deported its leaders. With only one year of existence the *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* had marked an important turning-point in the intellectual evolution of the country and sown good seeds for the future.

Unlike Phan Boi Chau, a champion of armed struggle, another patriotic scholar, Phan Chu Trinh,

advocated a movement to urge the colonial administration to carry out reforms, in particular the abolition of the monarchy and the mandarin system and the adoption of republican institutions. His reformism did not prevent him from being arrested in 1909 by the colonial authorities and he would have lost his life but for the intervention of French deputies. Phan Chu Trinh had the merit of being alive to Japanese ambitions since the start.

Peasant demonstrations, armed resistance

The partisans both of progressive reforms and of armed action agreed, however, to wage common struggles, in particular against old customs or the exactions of notables and the colonial authorities. The popular masses rapidly answered the slogans put forward by the scholars; the peasants driven to misery and crushed under taxes soon added their own demands: reduction of taxes, abolition of corvees. A clash became inevitable between the masses and the colonial authorities.

In February 1908 a slogan: "No more taxes paid to the French" was launched and rapidly spread. The colonial administration and the Huê Court, its agent and accomplice, immediately started a harsh repression. The movement none the less gathered momentum. The first peasant demonstrations broke out in Dai Loc district, Quang Nam province: thousands of

peasants coming from the villages mustered in front of the French resident's office, demanding a tax cut. For weeks on end, thousands of peasants in rags camped there in turn, listening to speakers passionately urging them to oppose the collection of taxes.

From Dai Loc, the movement spread to other districts of Quang Nam, then to the neighbouring province of Quang Ngai, and finally to Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Thua Thien. Reactionary notables were arrested or executed together with members of the "native militia". The residence of the mandarin Nguyen Than, a traitor who had helped the French repress the Phan Dinh Phung insurrection, was sacked. In Huê, the demonstrators gathered in great numbers in front of the French governor's palace for two days. Then the movement spread to Ha Tinh province, where it lasted four months. For the first time, the popular masses carried out an unarmed political struggle in the form of big demonstrations, real shows of strength to back concrete claims.

Colonial repression was bloody. Many demonstrators were shot dead. Several patriotic scholars, among them Tran Quy Cap, were put to death; others like Phan Chu Trinh, Huynh Thuc Khang (who was to become a minister in the DRVN government in 1945), Ngo Duc Ke, Le Van Huan... were sent to the Poulo Condor prison island. Thousands of arrested people were exposed to a scorching sun for days on end. A number of villages were completely razed. Thus, in 1908, while the peasant masses demonstrated their

strength, the colonial regime supplied every evidence of its cruelty.

During those years, Hoang Hoa Tham still held out in Yen The, being in contact with the *Zuy Tan* of Phan Boi Chau and with groups of Vietnamese mutineers in the colonial army. In 1909, breaking the truce signed in 1897, the French launched against the Yen The base a big expedition with 15,000 men and a powerful artillery. Combining guerilla actions with pitched battles, Hoang Hoa Tham managed to hold out for ten months, but the absence of other armed uprisings elsewhere in the country enabled the colonial administration to concentrate its forces against Yen The and to seize it. Hoang Hoa Tham resisted for another three years before being assassinated by a traitor on February 10, 1913. The Yen The base had held out from 1889 to 1909 thanks to skilful use of guerilla warfare supported by the peasant masses.

During the first two decades of this-century, one must also mention many uprisings by the highland people, which unfortunately were not coordinated with the patriotic movement in the deltas and were thus doomed to failure:

- Uprising of the Muong in Hoa Binh (1909-1910).
- Uprising of the Meo in Ha Giang (1911-1912).
- Uprisings of various ethnic groups in the Tay Nguyen Highlands: Sedang, Hre, Bahnar, Jarai...

Neither the fiasco of *Zuy Tan*, nor that of De Tham had discouraged Phan Boi Chau, who founded in 1912

a new league, the *Viet Nam Quang Phuc* (Association for the Restoration of Viet Nam) whose aims included the overthrow of the colonial regime and the establishment of a Vietnamese republic. After the triumph of the Chinese Revolution in 1911, Phan Boi Chau had taken refuge in China and his ideas had evolved along republican lines. However, as uprisings and demonstrations were harshly repressed, the *Quang Phuc* advocated the recourse to spectacular assassinations to awaken public opinion, passed death sentences on Governor-General Albert Sarraut and the traitor mandarins Hoang Trong Phu and Nguyen Duy Han. The latter was killed by a bomb in 1913; the same year, a patriot threw a bomb into a hotel in Hanoi, killing two French officers. Many people were arrested after these attempts and Phan Boi Chau was sentenced to death in absentia. When the First World War broke out, the *Quang Phuc* came to an end following the failure of some attempts at armed action on the China-Viet Nam border.

Viet Nam during the First World War (1914 — 1918)

While seeking to drain the natural and human resources of Indochina for the war, France brutally repressed all patriotic manifestations of the Vietnamese

people. Indochina — mainly Viet Nam — had to supply 50,000 combat troops and 40,000 workers, drafted in the countryside and sent to various fronts in France. Indochina also contributed 184 million piastres in loans, and 336,000 tons of food supplies. These burdens were all the heavier as the years from 1914 to 1917 were marked by many agricultural calamities.

However, for lack of a unified national organization, the Vietnamese national movement, though deep-rooted, was not able to capitalize France's wartime difficulties and carry out big uprisings. The scholars' movement had lost its vigour whereas the new social forces were not yet mature enough to impel significant movements.

As a matter of fact, the *Quang Phuc* plotted to seize Hanoi by a combined action of patriots from within and a revolutionary army from without. But the plot was discovered and many members were arrested; the rest rallied various other organizations, armed themselves with rudimentary weapons, and tried to win over soldiers of the "native militia". On January 6, 1913, 150 armed patriots stormed Phu Tho while other posts in several provinces, Nho Quan in Ninh Binh, and Mong Cai near the China frontier, were also attacked. All these assaults failed. The *Quang Phuc* planned a series of strikes against many military and administrative centres in Tonkin, but the project came to grief.

Still in Tonkin, on August 31, 1917, the Thai Nguyen garrison mutinied, led by Sergeant Trinh Van Can, a former partisan of Hoang Hoa Tham, and by Luong Ngoc Quyen, a member of the *Quang Phuc*. They succeeded in winning over many soldiers and killing the French commander, capturing a great quantity of weapons and munitions, and freeing many political prisoners, who joined their ranks. Thai Nguyen was liberated. After discussing the situation, the insurgents decided to entrench themselves in the town to consolidate their forces, instead of carrying their action into other provinces.

On September 4, the French recaptured the town. Dispersed in the mountainous regions around Thai Nguyen, the insurrectionists carried on the struggle against the 2,000 men on the French side for six months.

In Annam, the salient event was an attempt by King Zuy Tan — enthroned in 1907 at the age of 7 — who, acting on the counsel of patriotic mandarins and scholars — in particular Thai Phien and Tran Cao Van — called on the people to rise up. The main forces he counted on were the soldiers about to be sent to France and gathered by the thousand in Huê. The signal for the revolt was to be given on May 3, 1916. Unfortunately, the secret was uncovered and the French disarmed the soldiers before the chosen day. Zuy Tan sought to escape from the capital but was

captured and deported to the Reunion island. Isolated armed groups were rapidly disposed of by the French. Thai Phien and Tran Cao Van were executed.

In Cochinchina, patriotic activities manifested themselves in the first years of this century in the founding of secret societies. The most important one was the *Thien Dia Hoi* (Heaven and Earth Association) whose branches covered many provinces around Saigon. These societies often took the form of politico-religious organizations, and one of their main activities consisted in punishing traitors at the service of the French.

In connection with these secret societies, a movement was initiated in 1913 by a former bonze, Phan Xich Long, whose partisans, wearing white clothes and white turbans and armed with rudimentary weapons, stormed towns. Phan Xich Long was captured and executed by the French. In 1916 the secret societies in Cochinchina tried to attack several administrative centres, in particular the Saigon central prison and the palace of the governor of Cochinchina. On the night of February 14, 1916, thousands of people wearing amulets and equipped with knives secretly came to Saigon but were routed by French police and troops after unsuccessful battles.

The colonial administration, while harshly repressing the national movement, tried to placate an "élite" by grudgingly carrying out a few reforms, and especially by promising through the voices of some reputedly

“liberal ” governors-general important changes after the war. Of course, these promises were never kept. France's ability to maintain her rule in Viet Nam during the war years was primarily due to the weakness of the national movement. Although there always were patriots to raise the standard of revolt, the new, still inchoate, social forces could give the national movement neither impulse nor orientation. One must wait for these forces to develop in the following decades before the national movement could grow again on new bases.

III

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS AND FIRST LANDMARKS OF THE NATIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

(1919—1929)

THE decade which followed the end of World War II was characterized by an intensification of the French colonialists' economic exploitation of the country, which wrought important structural changes in Vietnamese society; on the other hand, with the emergence of new social forces, the national movement took on new forms, thus laying the first landmarks of the future national and democratic revolution.

Intensification of colonial economic exploitation

After World War I, French imperialism frenziedly pursued the development of its colonies to serve its own economic rehabilitation. The collapse of the franc and speculations on rubber in the world market hastened French investments in Indochina.

The *Banque de l'Indochine* increased its capital from 48 million piastres to 72 million. Set up by important French financial and industrial groups, that bank, which was also a bank of issue, controlled the main economic and financial activities of Indochina. It held actual sway over the country. The capital of *Credit Foncier* (Land Bank) was boosted from 6 million in 1923 to 50 million in 1925, that of the Financial and Colonial Company from 5 million in 1920 to 50 million in 1926.

From 1888 to 1918, 490 million francs were invested in Indochina, and 8,000 million from 1919 to 1929. These investments were far from really beneficial to the local economy. The influx of capital corresponded not to the needs of the country but to the interests of French lenders, who were anxious to get profits from these investments. More than half of these were retained in France for the execution of contracts and for financial operations. The investments were chiefly made in mining and rubber planting, that is, in enterprises aimed at draining the country of important quantities of raw materials for export. The return to France of business profits, French officials' savings, payments of arrears and loan interests, created a permanent financial deficit, so much so that far from giving any new financial resources to the country French investments played the role of a suction pump on the Vietnamese economy.

By keeping away from the industrial sector, and concentrating all economic activities on the production and exportation of coal, rubber and mineral ores, these investments, far from fostering the national economy, made it dependent on fluctuations in the world market.

Rubber provoked quite a rush; on the red soil of the basaltic plateaux of Nam Bo and Cambodia, vast plantations were granted to French companies, including Michelin. The areas planted with rubber-trees rose from 15,000 hectares in 1924 to 120,000 hectares in 1930, and the number of plantation hands from 3,000 to 80,000. From 298 tons in 1915, production rose to 10,309 tons in 1929. Coffee and tea plantations were also set up.

Indochina also ran a "mining fever". From 496 in 1923, the number of mining licences rose to 1,347 in 1924, 8,185 in 1928 and 17,685 in 1929. Most of the mines were located in Bac Bo. In 1913, 501,000 tons of coal were extracted, and 1,072,000 tons in 1929; tin, wolfram and lead mines were in operation, but there was no iron mine, and all the ores were exported.

On the other hand, the processing industries knew but limited development; only those which did not compete with French industry were maintained, chiefly under French management, the national bourgeois having practically no share in them. There were for instance, rice mills, the Nam Dinh Textile Mill, the Haiphong Cement Plant, tile and brick kilns; in all, a few enterprises located mainly in the Saigon, Cholon and Haiphong areas, with 86,000 workers in 1929.

Fat profits were due chiefly to extremely low wages. In 1925, the *Banque de l'Indochine* announced a profit of 36 million for a capital of 72 million; the *Compagnie Financière des Caoutchoucs* pocketed 31 million for a 100-million capital. These profits were sent back to France and contributed in no way to the expansion of the enterprises.

The budget continued to be fed by poll and land taxes and the three state monopolies of alcohol, salt and opium, in short by the heavy contributions imposed on a destitute population for the benefit of a cumbersome administrative, military and police machine. Seventy per cent of this budget was for the salaries of functionaries and policemen. The French

door-keeper at the University of Indochina earned three times as much as a Vietnamese professor. Imported goods were made very expensive by the customs barrier; Vietnamese rice and rubber fetched high prices in France, and the "development" of Indochina proved only profitable to the big colonial firms.

The colonial administration granted vast tracts of land to French settlers free of charge: 910,000 hectares in 1930.

In the political field, the promises loudly proclaimed during the war were not kept, the regime remaining as oppressive as ever. However, relying on the glib tongue of "liberal" and demagogic governors-general, the colonial administration tried to win over a small "elite" at the cost of grandiloquent speeches and a few benign reforms: setting up of a Great Economic and Financial Council of Indochina and of a Chamber of Agriculture as advisers to the governor-general. In Cochinchina, delegates of Vietnamese landlords and bourgeois could sit in the Colonial Council on a par with French delegates, this council being a consultative organ to the French governor. In Annam and Tonkin, Houses of People's Representatives, elected by a minority of people, were consultative organs under French senior residents.

These carefully selected delegates or representatives only served as a smokescreen and the people called them *nghe gat* ("yes deputies"). The colonial administration did not want to grant the Vietnamese bourgeois and feudalists any shred of power. To the king

himself there remained only the privilege of awarding honorific titles and grades to... village genies.

Viet Nam remained divided into three "countries" with different regimes, none of them with the slightest democratic liberties. No freedom of association, of the press, of opinion and even of movement within the country. The only favoured religion was Catholicism.

Feudalists and peasants

The process of social restructuration which began in the early part of this century was stepped up in the postwar years.

The feudalists were composed of the landlords and the members of the old state apparatus — king, mandarins and notables; to maintain their privileges, they placed themselves at the beck and call of the colonial administration, which in its turn, used the feudal apparatus to repress the people and levy taxes. Mandarins and notables used their power to grab fertile land: communal lands of the villages and lands belonging to the peasants. Despite the parcelling out of land among the landlords' offspring, the concentration of landed property actually grew owing to the rapid pauperization of the peasantry forced by heavy taxes to gradually sell off what remained of their land. The clearing of virgin land as well as the rise in the price of rice resulting from rapidly growing exports were largely profitable to the landlords. The landlord class, which accounted for from 3 to 5 per cent of the population,

grabbed about fifty per cent of the land. In Tonkin, where the land was divided into small parcels, the landlords possessed large numbers of scattered plots. In Annam, vast acreages of communal land were subjected in principle to periodical allotment, but the village notables always took the best ricefields. It was in Cochinchina, chiefly in the south and west of the Mekong delta that large estates were created under the colonial regime. The land made cultivable by canals dug and other works done by the population was distributed to faithful servants of the colonial administration. Estates of 50 hectares and more accounted for 50 per cent of the total acreage of cropland and were in 1930 owned by 6,500 landlords who made up a mere 2.5 per cent of the population. Some landlords owned up to several thousand hectares. The French colonists grabbed more than 200,000 hectares of ricefields in Cochinchina. Despite the size of their estates, here the landlords also leased them to *ta dien* (tenants) for rents amounting to as much as fifty per cent of the value of the crop. In Cochinchina, rents could be paid in cash, in Tonkin and Annam, only in kind. In Cochinchina, big Vietnamese landlords and French settlers founded a "rice-planters' society".

This appearance of big estates as well as the presence of French settlers in no way changed the backward agricultural technique. The landowners resorted essentially to a harsh exploitation of the peasants and never sought to improve technique. The mono-cultivation of rice was still predominant, and

the increase in production brought about by the extension of acreage benefited only export, while individual rice consumption decreased rapidly. The few existing rice-mills or motor-transport means worked solely for export. On the other hand, observed Gourou, a French geographer, throughout the Tonkin delta, there was not a single agricultural machine.

The peasantry made up over 90 per cent of the population.

With the development of a monetary economy, the rich peasants, who directly farmed their lands with the help of farm hands, grew in number. Their aim was not to become capitalists, but landowners. Meanwhile, the rapid concentration of landed property led to a diminishing number of middle-peasants, who had just enough land to live on.

The poor peasants, who had no or little land, made up the overwhelming majority. In Cochinchina all the *trien* were landless peasants; in Tonkin and Annam those who owned tiny plots were many; but millions of them, gradually robbed of their lands, buffaloes and farm tools, and unable to find employment in the towns, where industry was not developed, were obliged to rent land from landlords or colonists. Consequently, land rents were high, and rural overpopulation reached dramatic proportions, agents recruiting "coolies" for mines and plantations could impose draconian conditions, and famine caused by natural calamities frequently occurred. At harvest time, thousands of landless peasants gathered at market places to hire themselves out. In the slack

season, thousands of others went to the towns in a vain search for employment, returning to their villages only for the harvest.

In addition to high land rents, the peasants had to pay excessive interests (10% per month on the average) for their debts to landlords or other creditors. In case of illness or accident, the poor peasant ran into debts, often for life, owing to the accumulation of high interests. Frequently, to settle a debt, he had to sell his children or plot of land. On every festive or family occasion (anniversaries, weddings) the landlords would exact gifts or presents in kind from him.

The poor peasants had also to do *corvées* imposed by the rural mandarinal and colonial administration. The payment of poll-tax, which represented about one month's labour, was a heavy burden. Each year, when the colonial administration collected taxes through the agency of mandarins and notables, the villages resounded with laments and cries of despair, hundreds of thousands of peasants were arrested and flogged until their families had paid their poll-taxes.

The colonial administration thus strengthened the feudal structures: with the rapid impoverishment of the peasantry and the disappearance of old customs, village life lost all charm. No innovation was made, no new light shed on the squalid villages where the overwhelming majority of the people were illiterate. The feudal and colonial society weighed down heavily on millions of poor peasants who were bled white and savagely oppressed but who, once they

received a clear-sighted leadership, were to become the prime mover of the national and democratic revolution.

The proletariat, the force of the future

Born, as we have seen, before the national bourgeoisie, the working class experienced a new development. There were in 1929 about 220,000 workers: 53,000 in mines, 86,000 in factories, 80,000 in plantations, chiefly rubber plantations. Most of the French enterprises in Cambodia, Laos and New Caledonia employed Vietnamese labour numbering some tens of thousands.

Numerically, the working class represented a tiny section of the population but was concentrated in areas vital to the colonial economy: mines, rubber plantations, big towns and cities. It was the sole social class that was directly subjected to daily economic exploitation by the colonialists and was in direct and daily contact with modern production technique. It thus played a "strategic" role of paramount importance in Vietnamese society.

There were few specialized or qualified workers having a stable job; many worked on an irregular basis and returned to their villages when there was no work or when their contract had ended. Thus a close relation was established between workers and peasants, and the number of people who at some moment of

their lives had worked in colonial enterprises was much higher than the official figures.

The workers were ferociously exploited. Many women and children were employed in hard work. Recruiting agents scoured the countryside and had illiterate peasants sign contracts (supposedly after reading them) binding them to work for a mine or plantation for from three to five years. The recruiting agent received a fixed sum of money per worker recruited. These hired labourers were sent to rubber plantations in Cochinchina and nickel mines in New Caledonia where they lived and worked in very hard conditions. There was no limit to a work-day; the workers were ill-fed and exposed to malaria, the *cai* (overseers) subjected them to severe surveillance and frequent corporal punishment, and fines deducted from their wages pared down their already tiny incomes.

Mines as well as plantations had their own jails where workers were detained without trial; the French manager in fact could dispose of the life of the workers. The latter had to buy food and other necessities from canteens run by the companies. Their wages thus came back to the latter in a kind of closed circuit. Many workers died of disease or ill treatment; those who tried to run away were hunted down by a ferocious police. There was no legislation to protect the workers and no trade-union freedom; a strike was punished as a crime, with arrest, tortures, deportation. It was true slavery, vehemently denounced by some French journalists (for instance Louis Roubaud in *Les Jaunières*).

An important feature was the absence of a "worker aristocracy", which ruled out all more or less consistent reformist tendency in the workers' movement in Viet Nam as well as all chauvinistic trend. Under the colonial regime the Vietnamese working class was, as it were, homogeneous in its utter misery, because of the very harsh working and living conditions. In addition to the workers employed in more or less important enterprises, there were many poor labourers in the cities and harbours, and house servants living on uncertain jobs and reduced most of the time to chronic unemployment.

From 1919 to 1929, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie knew some development compared with the previous period but, crushed under the monopoly of French companies and suffering from strong competition by Chinese merchants, it always remained rickety. From 1924 to 1929 there appeared some Vietnamese capitalist firms which, however, never reached the size of the enterprises of the Chinese or Indian bourgeoisie. The Vietnamese bourgeoisie barely succeeded in acquiring some positions in home trade, small industry, transport and construction but, were kept away from foreign trade, big industry and mining. Each firm rarely employed more than a few dozen workers.

Those bourgeois who tried to develop the national economy met with strong opposition from the colonial administration; they were the national bourgeois who nurtured aspirations of independence. Others were chiefly distributors of French goods or contractors of public works; they were the comprador bourgeois. The line between the two groups was not clear,

the same bourgeois frequently shifting from one to the other. Bullied and stifled, the Vietnamese bourgeoisie often invested its profits in landed estates which it exploited according to the feudal mode. No important bourgeoisie ever developed in Viet Nam.

Numerically, the urban petty bourgeoisie was a more important section. It included small traders, craftsmen and chiefly students and intellectuals trained in the new schools; frequently school students took part in political and social actions. Neither school nor college enrolment was very great but the students were active and, like small traders in urban centres, responded quickly to events. Many intellectuals—professors, lawyers, doctors, journalists—were strongly influenced by the ideas of French progressives.

The craftsmen, who were in fairly large numbers—from 200,000 to 250,000—lived in both town and country. Like some villages in Tonkin, many town quarters specialized in handicrafts. The latter, subjected to severe competition by French manufactured goods and heavy taxation, could subsist only on condition that the craftsmen were satisfied with very small earnings in compensation for their labour, and sold their products very cheap. Many of them worked for capitalist firms, which raked in the bulk of profits.

The petty bourgeoisie, particularly the lower strata, keenly felt the suffering and humiliations imposed by the colonial regime and its national aspirations easily turned to revolutionary ideas.

A new upsurge of the national movement

On Vietnamese society then undergoing deep changes, besides the internal causes, there were added important external influences, some of which were to prove decisive in the post-war years.

The October 1917 Revolution, which ushered in a new historical era and heralded an irremediable general crisis of capitalism, created new conditions and opened up new prospects for national liberation in the colonies. In India, Indonesia, Egypt, this movement gained a new momentum; in China, things were moving swiftly while in France, the founding of the French Communist Party (1920) marked a new stage in the workers' movement.

Between 1918 and 1921, armed uprisings still broke out but were confined to some mountainous areas in Tonkin such as the rebellions of *Nung* and *Man* soldiers in the northeast and of *Meo* people in the northwest.

The bourgeoisie began to show signs of its political life by boycotting in 1919 not French goods—it was too weak for a direct confrontation with the occupier—but Chinese enterprises. Meetings were held and violence perpetrated against Chinese firms, but the movement never developed to any sizable scope. The colonial administration did not look askance at that movement, which created a diversion, but the population did not respond en masse to the slogans put forth.

In 1923, the Saigon bourgeoisie openly opposed a project granting a monopoly of import-export through the port of Saigon to a French company; the movement was backed by Chinese merchants and a section of public opinion as well as leftist M.P.s in France. They succeeded in baffling the project. It was in that bourgeoisie, composed mostly of ex-officials of the colonial administration enriched by rice-growing, that the "Constitutionalist Party", established in 1923, recruited its members. The only thing that party did was to claim a better position for the bourgeoisie in the colonial regime.

Much more important was the general effervescence, chiefly that of the working class and urban petty bourgeoisie. Newspapers were published, either in the vernacular or in French, in Cochinchina: *La Cloche fêlée* (The Cracked Bell), edited by Nguyen An Ninh, an intellectual returned from France, who took his inspiration from theoreticians of the French Revolution, *L'Annam* by an advanced progressive, Phan Van Truong (both in French); in Saigon: *Dong Phap Thoi Bao* (French Indochina Times) edited by Tran Huy Lieu; in Hanoi: *Huu Thanh* by Ngo Duc Ke; in Huê: *Tieng Dan* (Voice of the People) by Huynh Thuc Khang (all three in Vietnamese). Publishing houses were set up, printing books calling on the people to put up a patriotic struggle or popularizing political or scientific knowledge. Political organizations and new parties and groups were founded and carried out a virtually permanent political agitation: meetings, demonstrations, petitions, strikes... Political activities were

gradually carried out in modern forms, with the particularity that, due to a severe colonial repression, the organizations worked underground while the press was subjected to many restrictions and penalties: censorship, confiscation, closing down and frequently imprisonment or deportation of journalists.

After the failure of the armed uprisings staged during the war, the patriotic organizations which had taken refuge in China disintegrated. Their leader, Phan Boi Chau, lived in China until 1925 when he was arrested and brought back to Viet Nam. Meanwhile, he had studied Marxism-Leninism, got in touch with the Communists, and attempted rapprochement with them. The youngest and most zealous members of those organizations jointly set up the *Tam Tam Xa* which in 1924 achieved a resounding deed. Pham Hong Thai, a young member, threw a bomb on the French Governor-General Merlin then passing through Canton on his way to Japan. The assassination failed and Pham Hong Thai committed suicide by drowning but the attempt had wide repercussions. Many of the 100,000 or so Vietnamese coming to study in France or mobilized for the war were influenced by French political currents. Some came under the influence of non-revolutionary French leftist parties and were inspired by bourgeois democratic thinking. The most prominent of them was Phan Chu Trinh, a patriotic scholar who had been deported to Poulo Condor then brought to France by the colonial administration. He advocated a gradual struggle to abolish feudal institutions and win

democratic liberties under the colonial regime in order to move little by little towards autonomy, dropping the idea of armed struggle. He did not found any political party.

The second tendency was directly influenced by the October Revolution through the medium of the French workers' movement. The most illustrious representative of that tendency was Nguyen Ai Quoc who later took the name of Ho Chi Minh. Coming to France where he practised various trades, he got in touch with many French left-wing parties, groups, personalities and many militants from Africa and Asia. He also visited the U.S.A. and Great Britain. The October Revolution and Lenin's writings taught him that only Marxism-Leninism could provide the key to the liberation of the colonial peoples. A member of the French Socialist Party, at the Tours Congress in December 1920 he advocated joining the Third International and founding the French Communist Party. He regularly wrote for the French papers *l'Humanité*, *La Vie Ouvrière*, published *Le Paria*, set up the *League of Colonial Peoples*, wrote the pamphlet *French Colonization on Trial*. His militant activity and writings had a deep influence on the Vietnamese and other colonial residents in France and on public opinion in Viet Nam. In 1923, he left France for the Soviet Union and in 1924, came to Canton where he laid the foundations of a new-type revolutionary organization.

While its thinking and political organization were renewed, the working class began to put up struggles of ever wider scope. Strikes took place frequently. In

1919 and 1920, sailors and crewmen on board French ships struck; by their travels to France and China, the sailors could keep in touch with the world revolutionary movement. The years 1924-1925 were marked by big strikes at Cholon, Nam Dinh, Hai Duong and Hanoi. A political strike broke out at the Saigon arsenal: when two French men-of-war bound for China moored there for repair, the workers launched a strike and delayed the repair work to help the Chinese revolution. They also demanded a 20% wage-increase and the readmission of the workers who had been dismissed for claiming a thirty minutes' break. This 8-day strike involved several thousand workers and ended in a brilliant success. The two French ships left Saigon only four months later. One of the leaders of the strike was Ton Duc Thang, who had taken part in many movements in France together with French workers, and in the mutiny staged in 1918 by French sailors sent to the Black Sea to help crush the Soviet Revolution. He is now President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

On the national plane, three important movements were launched in 1925 and 1926: two to demand the release of Phan Boi Chau then Nguyen An Ninh, and the third on the occasion of Phan Chu Trinh's funeral. The colonial administration had to amnesty Phan Boi Chau who had been sentenced to death. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated on this occasion in big cities, especially Saigon.

One must always bear in mind the savage character of the repression by the colonial authorities in order

to accurately appraise the courage and political maturity of the masses and leaders who had organized those strikes and demonstrations.

Regroupment of patriotic and revolutionary forces

In face of that patriotic effervescence, the colonial administration attempted a few minor reforms in order to appease popular indignation and to placate some opportunist elements. The socialist Varenne buckled down to that task, but only the "Constitutionalist Party" of the big rice-planters in Saigon contented themselves with these scraps. Patriots and revolutionaries understood the necessity of organizing the masses, who had been set in motion in order to start an all-out struggle, a *sine qua non* condition for progress and liberation. So, starting from 1925, new patriotic and revolutionary organizations made their appearance.

In Canton, with the *Tam Tam Xa* as nucleus, Nguyen Ai Quoc set up the *Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi* (Young Revolutionaries' Association), *Thanh Nien* for short. From the homeland or from Siam, where lived a Vietnamese colony, youths came to China to attend a revolutionary training course organized by Nguyen Ai Quoc, and were sent back to the country to set up revolutionary bases. *Thanh Nien* had over the other organizations the advantage of a clearly set forth theory and organizational principles which made it possible for its cadres to rapidly win over the

masses and set up solid organizations. The militants learnt the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, summed up and adapted to Viet Nam's conditions by Nguyen Ai Quoc in his booklet *Duong Kach Menh* (The Revolutionary Road). Three entirely new principles were put forward for the patriotic and revolutionary movement in Viet Nam:

1. Revolution is the work of the worker and peasant masses and not of some heroes, hence the necessity of organizing them and leading them into struggle.

2. In order to triumph, the revolution must be led by a Marxist-Leninist party, hence the necessity of setting up a new-type party.

3. The national revolution must be integrated into the world revolution, the Vietnamese people must act in concert with the world proletariat, hence the necessity of conforming to the policy of the Third International.

Thanh Nien was the sole organization to publish a regular underground paper. Its members were directed to work in work-shops, plantations, mines and to militate among peasants, students, small traders, intellectuals. They still knew little about Marxism and had little practical experience; yet, they made a successful criticism of the reformist and chauvinistic conceptions of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

An initial major test for *Thanh Nien* was the failure of the Canton commune in December 1927; many of its members were arrested; the Kuomintang tried to force it into taking a nationalist line. But *Thanh Nien* successfully faced the trial and continued to

develop its network of mass organizations in Viet Nam, China and among the Vietnamese residents in Siam. By 1928, it was the most powerful underground organization in the country.

Parallel with *Thanh Nien*, a party of Marxist tendency, *Tan Viet*, was founded in the country to rally young students on the one hand, and political prisoners released from Poulo Condore on the other. It sent to Canton several of its members, among them *Tran Phu*, to receive a revolutionary training under Nguyen Ai Quoc's guidance and to discuss the merging of the two parties. *Tan Viet* afterwards worked out a programme and rules similar to those of *Thanh Nien*.

In Cochinchina Nguyen An Ninh founded an underground party chiefly among the petty intellectuals in Saigon; its loose organization and ill-defined program did not survive the arrest of its leader, the first time in 1925 and the second time in 1928.

The nationalist tendency found expression mainly in the founding of the *Viet Nam Quoc Zan Dang* (Viet Nam Nationalist Party) starting from a core, the *Nam Dong Thu Xa*, whose main activity was the publication of patriotic books. This publishing house was closed by the colonial administration; the advocates of armed struggle prevailed and the *Quoc Zan Dang* was set up on December 25, 1927, under the leadership of Nguyen Thai Hoc. Its membership was essentially made up of intellectuals, students, petty officials and patriotic-minded notabilities. It did not strive to set up mass organizations but to win over soldiers to

prepare for armed struggle. It was heavily influenced by the Chinese Kuomintang and put forward a programme aimed at achieving national independence and setting up a democratic power, but its social program remained very ill-defined. Influenced by the Kuomintang, it displayed an anti-communist tendency. It established its bases chiefly in Tonkin and was practically unknown in the centre and south of the country.

In the South, the largest movement was *Cao Dai*, an original kind of politico-religious society which lumped together in a broad syncretism elements of many religions — Christianity, Buddhism, Islam — and various doctrines, the cult of various gods and historical personages ranging from the Christ to Victor Hugo. Practices derived from spiritism mingled with liturgical forms copied from Catholicism, but Cao Dai was chiefly characterized by a strict hierarchy modelled after the Catholic church, with a “pope” and a well-organized clergy. It had its “Holy See” at Tay Ninh and was largely practised by the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie.

Its widespread influence was due to the religious background of a peasantry who had not yet been influenced by the revolutionary movement and to the necessity for some politicians to camouflage their activities. The colonial administration also planted agents in its midst to keep watch over the movement and give it a certain direction. Cao Dai had over one million followers and hundreds of churches. The upper echelon was mostly in the hands of landlords and high-ranking officials.

The appearance of all those parties, organizations and newspapers was to give the movement an ever stronger base for action. In particular, the period from 1927 to 1929 was marked by a series of strikes in Haiphong, Nam Dinh, Saigon and the rubber plantations. Even in Hué crushed under the monarchic and colonial administration, school and college students grew restless. The colonial administration gave up all show of liberalism as preached by Varenne and shifted to naked repression. Varenne was replaced in 1928 by Pasquier, a colonial official. A confrontation between the colonial administration and the Vietnamese patriotic and revolutionary forces was not long in coming.

Yen Bai :
the failure of Quoc Zan Dang
and its disappearance

In February 1929, faithful to its tactics of terrorist actions and plots, the *Quoc Zan Dang* had Bazin, a recruiter of "coolies" for plantations and mines, assassinated. The colonial police closed in on that nationalist party, which faced complete dislocation. It reacted by resorting to strict partitioning, trying to suppress infiltrated traitors, increasing its membership among soldiers, and stepping up preparations for armed struggle. But it never carried out any mass action. Arms depots were discovered by the colonial police; turncoats denounced many sections organized in army barracks. The party leaders came to the conclusion

that it was necessary to accelerate armed action. They knew that conditions were not yet ripe but thought that "should the revolution fail, at least honour would be saved." They made up their minds to switch over to action, taking the oath "to die for the world's peoples to know that the Vietnamese people's spirit remains fully alive."

On the night of February 9 and 10, 1930, Vietnamese soldiers of the Yen Bai garrison, in the northwest of the Red River delta, rebelled, killed their French officers and seized the arms depot. Similar actions were carried out in the neighbouring provinces of Phu Tho and Son Tay, and a few bombs were hurled in Hanoi. In the provinces of Hai Duong and Kien An, people rose up in some localities. But the rest of the country did not budge, not even the popular masses in the towns and provinces where the uprisings took place. The insurgents failed to capture the town of Yen Bai. The insurrection could not last. The party leaders were arrested and executed. They died with the greatest courage. The Yen Bai uprising stirred up Vietnamese and French opinion. The newly-founded Indochinese Communist Party backed the insurrection. In the French parliament, the French Communist Party also supported it.

Repression was bloody. The *Quoc Zan Dang* lost its entire leadership. Its basic organizations were dislocated. Yen Bai was its first and last feat of arms. Not deeply rooted in the popular masses, it could not withstand repression and reorganize itself. The younger and more dynamic elements rapidly turned to

other revolutionary roads. Leaders and militants took refuge in China where under Chiang Kai-shek's aegis, they tried to reorganize their party, but in vain. The *Quoc Zan Dang* disappeared from the political arena; those who returned to the country in the vans of Chiang Kai-shek's troops in 1945 had nothing in common with the Yen Bai patriots.

Founding of the Communist Party

The development of national and socio-economic struggles among the workers, peasants and intellectuals and the failure then disappearance of the *Quoc Zan Dang* required more than ever the creation of a party capable of leading the movement and co-ordinating the struggles. *Thanh Nien* members who were taking part in these struggles felt the urgent need for a Marxist-Leninist party. The first communist cell was set up in Hanoi in March 1929. In May of the same year, delegates to the *Thanh Nien* National Congress proposed the founding of a Communist Party. There was no opposition but the decision was postponed by the majority in order to have enough time for preparation. Upon its return home, the Tonkin delegation to the Congress, which had made that proposal, created on its own initiative the *Dong Zuong Cong San Dang* (Indochinese Communist Party), issued a manifesto, recruited its members among those of the *Thanh Nien*, published a paper, *Bua Liem* (Hammer and Sickle) and set up a trade-union federation with a press

publication which had a great influence, chiefly in Tonkin and Annam.

In its turn, the *Thanh Nien* Central Committee decided to found the *Annam Cong San Dang* (Annamese Communist Party). *Tan Viet* also turned into a new party, the *Dong Zuong Cong San Lien Doan* (Indochinese Communist League). Thus under the pressure of grass-roots militants and because of historical exigencies, three communist parties successively saw the light of day: the *Thanh Nien* and *Tan Viet*, having fulfilled their historical mission, gave way to the new parties. Immediately, the latter's merging became an urgent necessity.

In February 1930, Nguyen Ai Quoc presided over a conference of delegates of the three parties at Kowloon (China); on February 3, the merging was decided and the rules of a unified party adopted, together with those of mass organizations: trade-unions, peasants' unions, communist youth unions, women's associations, red relief associations.

It was a great turning point in the history not only of the working class, but also of Viet Nam's national movement, now led by a party armed with a scientific theory and well-tested principles of action and organization, closely linked to the world revolutionary movement and capable of leading the popular masses into a multiform struggle, elaborating a well-defined program and opening up clear prospects for the future of the nation and the various social classes—things which were tragically missing in the

organizations and parties which had preceded it in the anti-imperialist struggle.

At its first plenum held in October 1930, the Central Committee of the new Party gave it the name of *Dang Cong San Dong Zuong* (Indochinese Communist Party) and adopted the political theses prepared by Tran Phu, the Party's first Secretary General.

After a concrete analysis of Viet Nam's colonial and semi-feudal society, the Party's political program considered that the Vietnamese revolution was in essence a bourgeois democratic revolution but was led by the working class and heading directly for the socialist revolution without going through the stage of capitalist development. It must carry out two essential tasks:

- To fight against French imperialism, and wrest back national independence; and

- To fight against feudalism, and give land to the peasants.

These two tasks are closely linked together. It was the first time that a party explicitly joined the national question to the peasant question, while the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties, incapable of formulating a clear cut agrarian programme, had also been incapable of carrying through the struggle for national salvation.

The political theses made it clear that the essential motive force of the revolution was the workers and peasants. The principles of action consisted in involving the popular masses in a daily struggle for their interests and rights in order to raise their political

consciousness and their organizational capacity, and, when conditions are ripe, launching an armed insurrection, seizing power and setting up a worker-peasant state. The essential condition of success is the existence of a Marxist-Leninist leading party capable of defining a correct political line, maintaining in its ranks strict discipline and identity of views, remaining in close touch with the masses and displaying absolute loyalty to the revolution.

On that basis, the Party began a complex and arduous struggle which was to result, fifteen years later, in the seizure of power.

IV

**FROM THE ECONOMIC
DEPRESSION TO WORLD WAR II
REGROUPING OF NATIONAL
AND DEMOCRATIC FORCES**

(1930 — 1939)

THE 1930 economic depression laid bare the utter fragility of the colonial economy and greatly increased the misery of the masses, thus creating conditions for major upheavals. In the ensuing years, the rise of fascism in the world, in particular the setting up of the Hitlerite regime in Germany and the Japanese aggression against China, together with the subsequent development of the anti-fascist struggle, and the advent of the Popular Front in France — all had profound repercussions in Indochina, especially in Viet Nam. Within the country, the decisive factor was the founding of the *Indochinese Communist Party* which was to become the leading organization of the national and democratic movement. The colonial administration, faced with the development of the national and popular movement, reacted by a large scale brutal repression but proved itself incapable of checking it. The Vietnamese national movement was brought to a new high when the Second World War broke out.

The economic crisis

The economic depression of 1930 assumed an exceptionally grave character in Indochina due to the congenital weakness of the colonial economy, which had moreover to bear part of the consequences of the French crisis,

the "mother country" seeking to make up for its losses by intensifying its exploitation of the colonies.

The drop on the world market of the prices of raw materials, in particular rice, rubber and coal, profoundly affected the Indochinese economy, the "prosperity" of which rested on the export of these products. Exports fell from 228 million piastres in 1929 to 102 million in 1932 while imports dropped from 227 million to 94 million. The prices of rice and rubber were as follows:

	<u>1928-30</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1932</u>
Rice (100kg)	10.8 piastres	6.72	4.25
Rubber (kg)	22 francs	5	3

Exports of rice dropped from 1,900,000 tons in 1928 to 960,000 tons in 1931 and the rice-growing area from 2,200,000 hectares to 1,850,000 hectares. Hundreds of rice-husking factories closed down and thousands of junks were left idle. Only one-third of the 126,000 hectares of rubber was exploitable.

The labour force in the mines fell from 46,000 in 1930 to 33,700 in 1932; most of the workers were moreover only half employed. Coal production dropped from 1,972,000 tons in 1929 to 1,592,000 tons in 1933. The chromium mine in Co Dinh was closed. All construction work was brought to a halt. Here are the indices of construction in Saigon:

<u>1922</u>	<u>1929</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1931</u>
100	21.4	90	39

Except for a few branches which were able to maintain normal production (power, cement, alcohol)

the whole economy sank into a recession. The above-cited figures chiefly concern colonial capital; it was difficult to evaluate the ruin of the Vietnamese small producers, peasants, craftsmen, small traders and landowners. More visible was the mass unemployment which struck the workers, employees and small functionaries; those still with a job saw their income drop sharply.

Even a number of French petty functionaries became jobless and some of them, in order to stress their claims, went so far as to work as rickshaw pullers in Saigon streets. The number of unemployed workers and employees was rated at one-third of the total: no relief or subsidies were granted and the great majority of the jobless had to return to their families in the villages already plunged in growing misery. Wages dropped sharply:

<i>Daily wages</i>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1936</u>
Coal mining worker	0.7 piastre	0.4	0.36
Skilled worker			
in Saigon	1.5	1.22	1.13
Unskilled woman			
worker in Hai Phong	0.31	0.21	0.17

According to the French economist Paul Bernard, a Vietnamese workingman in the thirties earned an average of 49 piastres or 490 francs per year, against 6,200 francs for a French worker and 12,500 for an American worker in the same period.

The functionaries went through hard times. Worktime was augmented, while work was cut, resulting in the laying-off of numerous functionaries and employees while

salaries were cut by one half for the newly-recruited. In 1931 the administration dismissed one-seventh of its personnel, reduced salaries by 25% and compelled many functionaries to go into premature retirement. Many secondary-school and even college graduates could not find any job and had to teach in private schools or take up journalism. Many of them later joined the revolutionary ranks.

To cope with the crisis, the colonial administration took a series of measures aimed chiefly at making up for the drop in tax revenue, the result of the general impoverishment of the population, and rescuing the major colonial firms; all these new burdens fell on a population already suffering from heavy taxation and unemployment. Customs duties on imported goods were increased.

Important credits were granted to the rubber plantations — 100 million francs a year to 14 companies grouping 1,005 planters, chiefly Frenchmen, who received a subvention of 2-3 francs for every kilogram of rubber produced. The indebted rice-growers also received loans; but since no loans amounted to less than 5,000 piastres and could be granted without mortgage of land, the money went mostly to the big landowners. The *ta dien* — the landless peasants who suffered the most from the crisis—received neither subsidy nor relief. In a word, the administration took money away from the most destitute strata to give to the big companies and latifundists. Never had colonial exploitation taken such a naked form.

The Indochinese economy was bound even more tightly to that of France; the piastre was tied to the franc and to gold, the rate being fixed at 10 francs to one piastre. Bringing into play "imperial preference", France considerably increased her share in the foreign trade of her colonies. The Vietnamese economy was therefore more and more cut off from its geographical environment and tied to France; loans voted in Paris placed new credits at the disposal of the colonial administration, but the population would have to pay the interests, and the French industrialists would try all the harder to prevent the industrialization of Indochina. Therefore, the big colonial companies sailed through the crisis without any major damage while smaller societies, mostly founded by Vietnamese, disappeared one after another. All velleity of "autonomous" economic development was shattered.

There might seem at first that the fall in rice exports would lead to a lessening of hunger in the countryside. Nothing of the kind happened. In order to pay their taxes, the poor farmers had to sell three to four times more rice to get the necessary money; whereas before 1930 15 work-days would get them enough money for the head-tax, two to three months of work would not suffice during the crisis years. Food shortage appeared even in the richest provinces of Cochinchina, Bac Lieu for instance, while famine occurred in the northern provinces of Annam. The price of land dropped considerably; in Cochinchina, one hectare of ricefield, which used to sell at 1,000

piastres, was now sold at 150 or 200 piastres. Indebted farmers had to sell their plots to the big landowners. The latter in their turn mortgaged their land to the *Credit foncier* (Land Credit Bank). Thus, the concentration of land and the pauperization of the peasantry were more and more accentuated.

Another indication of economic recession: currency circulation in 1935, in Paul Bernard's estimates, dropped by 35% compared with the twenties.

The economic crisis thus revealed in all their magnitude the defects and servitudes of the colonial economy.

The large-scale struggles of 1930-1931

The failure of the *Quoc Zan Dang* in Yen Bai in no way prevented the development of the national and popular struggle. Among the masses, whose living conditions were upset by the economic crisis, the Communist Party, as soon as it was founded, was to act as a veritable ferment. The Party took in hand the leadership of the popular struggles, giving them an impetus and new forms.

In 1930, underground trade unions formed by the Party grouped about 10,000 members; the Party's policy consisted in organizing the working class to enable it to lead the revolutionary action of the masses. The question was to transform the factories

into revolutionary fortresses. Big strikes were launched; the colonial administration gave these figures: 43 strikes in the period from April 1929 to April 1930, and 32 from May 1st, 1930 to May 1st, 1931.

What was even more important than the number of strikes was their character of bitter struggle, their level of organization and the political consciousness of the participants.

A strike is legal in Europe; in Viet Nam a striker risked a prison term of up to five years, and often deportation if he was accused of being a "Communist". Police and troops never hesitated to fire on strikers and demonstrators. Against police brutalities, the strikers reacted often vigorously: in March 1930, strikers at the Phu Rieng rubber plantation disarmed the soldiers of the local post, and felled trees to erect roadblocks; women violated by Foreign Legionaries blinded their ravishers with a mixture of ashes and lime.

For the first time Vietnamese workers celebrated May Day at Ben Thuy, in Nghe An province. The French employer and police opened fire on them, killing 7 and wounding 13.

Strikes required big material sacrifices from an already destitute working class. This did not prevent the 4,000 workers of the Nam Dinh textile mill from striking for three weeks, and the 1,200 workers of the Ben Thuy match factory from launching two strikes in 1930 alone, one of them lasting 40 days. Not only workers of other factories, but also peasants from

neighbouring villages came to the help of the strikers. The worker-peasant alliance was strengthened, with local Party organizations leading the struggles of both the worker and peasant masses. The leadership of all the strikes was firmly in the hands of the underground trade-unions and the organizations of the Communist Party; no nationalist party, no yellow trade-union succeeded in establishing bases in the factories. All the strikes were followed with sympathy by the rest of the population who saw in them, not without reason, not only struggles for the interests of the workers, but also manifestations of anti-colonialist patriotism. The strikes of 1930-1931 soon expanded to a national scale, reaching nearly all the major factories: rubber plantations, the Haiphong cement factory, the Nam Dinh textile mill, the locomotive repair shops in Vinh and Zi An, the Saigon power plant, the depots of the Shell and Standard Oil companies, the coal mines, etc.

Along with the workers' strikes, big peasant demonstrations totalling about half a million participants broke out in 25 provinces especially in Tonkin and Annam. Here too, their leadership was also assumed by the grassroots organizations of the Communist Party, which had set up farmers' unions grouping about 70,000 members in 1930. The close union between the worker and peasants' struggles under the leadership of the Communist Party became the new and essential factor in the national movement; no other political party had ever succeeded in setting up a worker-peasant alliance, which was to play a decisive role in the national struggle.

The workers' strikes as well as the peasants' demonstrations took place under watchwords of both an economic and a political character: wage increase, reduction of work hours, abolition of corporal punishment, freedom of trade-union and freedom of strike for the workers; equitable distribution of communal lands, reduction of land rents, interest rates and taxes, cancellation of debts and granting of subsidies against famine for the peasants. The slogan "land to the tillers" was put up in some places; farmers burnt debt acknowledgements and title deeds in the hands of rich landowners, and assaulted administrative offices.

It was in the provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh (Nghe-Tinh) that the struggle reached its climax. The Vinh-Ben Thuy town was at the time a fairly important workers' centre; local peasants led a miserable life on unproductive lands; and the traditions of national struggle were particularly strong, Nghe-Tinh being the birthplace of many patriotic scholars.

On May 1st, 1930, workers and peasants demonstrated together in celebration of International Labour Day, and the movement grew increasingly in the following months. On September 22, near Vinh town, 20,000 peasants held a demonstration; the colonial administration ordered troops and airplanes to fire on the marchers, killing 217 persons and wounding 126 others. These acts of terror, however, could not prevent the movement from intensifying. In 9 districts of the two provinces of Nghe-Tinh, the local functionaries fled to town while the village authorities handed

over their seals to the peasants. Peasants' associations took over local administrative functions, thus creating an embryonic form of revolutionary power on a territory with 100,000 inhabitants.

The revolutionary power redistributed the communal lands, allotted to poor peasants lands belonging to reactionary landlords, ordered the reduction of land rents and interest rates, the cancellation of debts, the abolition of the head-tax. It also organized production, and launched a campaign for the abolition of backward customs and habits and the elimination of illiteracy. People's self-defence militia units were created, and the traitors punished. Enthusiasm prevailed in the liberated regions. Numerous songs and poems were composed to express the joy of the masses. It was a veritable people's democratic power, which the population called the "Nghe-Tinh Soviets".

For several months, the Nghe-Tinh Soviets opposed a grim resistance to the troops and aircraft of the colonial administration; however, conditions were not yet ripe for a victorious insurrection. The movement came to an end by the middle of 1931. Nevertheless, the Nghe-Tinh Soviets constituted an important landmark, a veritable prelude to a future revolution. Parallel with the Nghe-Tinh Soviets, a peasant revolt broke out in the province of Quang Ngai; in Cochinchina many peasant demonstrations took place in Sadec, Vinh Long, Soc Trang, etc.

Colonial repression and terror

Deeply worried about the development of the popular movement, and compelled to cope with it on all fronts, the colonial administration sought to retrieve the situation by a more and more brutal repression. Police, regular troops and air forces were unleashed against the crowds; torture was widely used; prison, deportation and death sentences were given lavishly; and in the worst cases, the troops, particularly the Foreign Legion, carried out summary executions, sowing terror in numerous localities.

The following figures released by the colonial administration—though much watered down—give an idea of the magnitude of the repression:

1929: 1,490 arrests, 3 death sentences, 300 prison sentences.

1930: 699 persons killed during the strikes and demonstrations, 2,963 persons detained, 83 death sentences, 543 life sentences to forced labour or imprisonment, 795 sentences to prison terms totalling 3,648 years, and 780 cases of deportation.

1931: in the first four months alone: 1,419 arrests, 1,023 sentences to life imprisonment, 604 sentences to forced labour.

In 1932, the number of political detainees in various prisons including the jails of Poulo Condor and French Guiana rose about to 10,000.

That repressive campaign achieved some results, notably depriving the movement temporarily of leadership. The Secretary General of the Communist Party, Tran Phu, was arrested and tortured to death. The scope of the disturbances and the repression aroused a movement of opinion in France in favour of the condemned, a movement inspired by the French Communist Party and the CGTU (*Confédération générale du travail unitaire*).

To screen the repression, the colonial administration carried out some semblance of reform in order to deceive the popular masses and to woo the "elite". "Conciliation commissions" were created in the factories and a program was worked out to set up small farms of 5 to 10 hectares for the peasants in western Cochinchina, in the Central Highlands and in the midlands of Tonkin, some modifications were brought to school curriculums while the Court of Huê created a "Ministry of Education." Some additional seats were given to Vietnamese in the colonial councils. King Bao Dai, who was then living in France, was brought back to Huê, allegedly to reform the monarchy. The French assigned two assistants to Bao Dai: Pham Quynh, a faithful servant of the colonial administration, as "cabinet director", and the Catholic mandarin Ngo Dinh Diem who had distinguished himself in the 1930-1931 repression. A bitter rivalry soon developed between these two men, each supported by a colonialist group. Out of vexation, Ngo Dinh Diem resigned, and turned to Japan.

The colonial administration also relied on the activity of Catholic missions to regain control over

the troubled regions, and promoted the creation of Buddhist groupings and of organizations working for the renaissance of Confucianism. It sponsored the organization of dancing clubs, fairs, beauty contests... with a view to turning a section of the youth toward pleasure-seeking.

A new start for the national and popular movement

The repression had eliminated the nationalist parties and groups from the political scene, but could create only temporary hindrance to the activity of the Communist Party, which had struck deep roots in the popular masses. Many militants, especially in the villages, had escaped arrest thanks to the people's protection; others, who had taken refuge abroad, returned to the country, and those who had been sentenced to only short prison terms resumed their activities immediately after their release. In the prisons, political and theoretical courses were held which were to give the detained militants a solid training. A leading committee was formed with Le Hong Phong at its head; as early as 1932 a program of action laid down a general line for the militants, and mass organizations gradually resumed their activities.

Strikes broke out anew in the rubber plantations, printing offices and rice-husking mills, notably in Saigon. The year 1935, one of economic recovery, also saw big strikes break out in Saigon. Also in this city,

Vietnamese landowners and bourgeois, acting in concert with a number of Frenchmen, campaigned against the tying of the piastre to the franc and the domineering position of the Bank of Indochina. Thus a process of differentiation began within the colonialist clan itself.

New forms of action were undertaken; Nguyen Van Tao and Nguyen An Ninh founded the journal *Trung Lap* (Neutrality); in 1933, in the Saigon municipal elections, a "workers' ticket" headed by Nguyen Van Tao won many seats in spite of restrictions in the electoral system. Big meetings often grouping thousands of persons were organized where the speakers defended the interests of the working masses and demanded democratic freedoms. A French-language paper, *La Lutte* (Struggle), was published, which had a great influence on the intellectual circles. The rostrum of the Saigon Municipal Council became a platform from which to popularize some claims. Thus in conjunction with actions by the masses, which remained the most important ones, appeared the first forms of legal struggle, the first ever in the history of the national movement.

In 1934, a fact-finding mission sent by the CGTU, the French Popular Relief and the French Committee of Action for the Amnesty of Political Prisoners came to Viet Nam, led by the French Communist deputy Gabriel Péri; its activity had profound repercussions in Vietnamese public opinion, which highly appreciated the militant solidarity shown by the French working class.

In 1935, new municipal elections were held in Saigon: the Nguyen Van Tao ticket won four of the six seats reserved for the Vietnamese as against 12 seats reserved for the French. Success was also recorded in the elections to the Colonial Council. In the eyes of the Communist Party, these election successes in no way constituted the main goal of the struggle; yet they afforded opportunities to popularize slogans and arouse the political consciousness of the masses in order to prepare them for more important actions.

The situation was evolving rapidly. The fascist powers had consolidated their alliance, forming the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis while a rapprochement took shape between the Soviet Union and the Western powers with a view to coping with the fascist danger. In China, Japanese aggression moved southward and war was approaching the borders of Indochina. The Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang got allied with each other to resist Japanese aggression. Japanese fascism aimed not only at conquering China but also extending its domination to Southeast Asia as a whole.

In France faced with the fascist danger, a vast coalition was formed, grouping within a Popular Front the three big leftwing parties: communist, socialist and radical. The success of the Popular Front in the 1936 elections led to the formation of a government headed by the Socialist Party and supported by the Communist Party. Fascism was defeated in France and the French working class made important political and social gains. A law granting amnesty to

political prisoners in the colonies was promulgated and a fact-finding commission was appointed to define the necessary conditions for reforms. The formation of the Popular Front government in France incontestably created favourable conditions for the Vietnamese national movement to make rapid progress.

It was evident, however, that the decisive factor remained the actions of the Vietnamese popular masses who had resumed their activities, and the prime condition for success was a judicious course to be charted by the leading body, the Indochinese Communist Party, the sole political organization with bases throughout the country and among all social strata.

The Party Central Committee took a series of important decisions in the summer of 1936:

In the present circumstances, the Indochinese Revolution must be part of the anti-fascist world front for democracy and peace; the watch-words: "overthrow French imperialism", and "confiscate the landlords' lands and distribute them to the peasants" were temporarily withdrawn. The Party called for the founding of a broad "anti-imperialist popular front" which would rally all social strata, political parties, religious and ethnic groups in Indochina in order to struggle for elementary democratic liberties, freedom of meeting, association, opinion, publication, movement, freedom to go abroad, amnesty for political prisoners, an 8-hour workday, labour legislation, and the broadening of the elected economic and social councils.

However, these slogans failed to differentiate the ranks of the colonialists, and a Central Committee plenum meeting in March 1938 decided to found an *Indochinese Unified Democratic Front* in order to rally all democratic and progressive forces and spearhead the struggle against the most dangerous enemy at the time — the French fascists and the reactionary colonialists.

The Central Committee advocated legal and semi-legal action with broad mass participation in a resolute struggle for democratic freedoms. But the Party continued to keep its underground bases and its objectives concerning the national and democratic revolution.

The colonial policy of the French Popular Front provided the Party with the opportunity to launch a vast campaign for the holding of an "Indochinese Congress", a kind of States General where the different social strata and groupings would put forward their claims while the working masses in the towns and countryside would continue their struggle for the improvement of their living conditions. Committees of action were created throughout the country, campaigning among numerous segments of the population. Under the double influence of the popular movement in Indochina and progressive opinion in France, the colonial administration had to set free many political detainees who were thus able to bring a precious contribution to the movement. From Saigon where a Provisional National Committee was elected, the movement spread to Annam and Tonkin; here under the auspices of the "Indochinese Democratic Front" and

animated by able militants, big meetings were held and patriots were elected to the Hanoi Municipal Council and the People's Chamber of Representatives in Hanoi and Huê.

Political meetings and demonstrations and strikes succeeded one another without let-up. The colonial administration took a series of measures aimed at impeding this seething political activity; it banned all gatherings, and enjoined the Provisional National Committee of the Indochinese Congress to submit its claims then to dissolve. The Committee refused. The administration then brought pressure to bear upon the leaders of the Constitutionalist Party to make them leave the Congress and convene a conference to submit the "people's aspirations". Then the administration ordered the arrest of the chief promoters of the Congress and its dissolution.

However, the dissolution of the Indochinese Congress could neither block the movement, nor prevent the population from winning new, important, successes.

First, the amnesty of political prisoners. This watch-word quickly became very popular, and the most diverse groups as well as newspapers of all shades fought for the amnesty. Several thousand detainees were thus set free who, as already said, made important contributions to the movement. There remained, however, several thousand others whom the colonial administration continued to keep in its jails.

Another success was the promulgation of some social legislation. As from November 1936, the work-day should not exceed 10 hours; 9 hours as from the first

of January 1937 and 8 hours as from the first of January 1938. It was forbidden to employ women and children in night shifts. The workers were entitled to a day off every week and from 5 to 10 days of paid holidays every year. Wages should be paid in cash, and it was forbidden to deduct fines from them. Women workers were entitled to a 8-week maternity leave. It was not a paid leave but the employer was no longer allowed to dismiss pregnant women workers as he was wont to do previously. This social legislation did not include freedom of trade-union, freedom of strike, and social insurance, in short, the fundamental rights of the working people. It nevertheless represented an important step forward. Its implementation was to meet with stiff resistance from the colonial administration as well as the employers and persevering struggles were needed to carry it into effect.

In this general political atmosphere, stimulated by the gains obtained, the Vietnamese working class went through a period of great effervescence. In the second half of 1936, 361 strikes were recorded, some of which truly political ones, like that staged by Saigon workers in protest against the arrest of promoters of the Indochinese Congress. The most important strike was that of the 25,000 workers of the Quang Yen coal mines. Wage increases, reduction of work hours, trade-union freedom and democratic liberties were the principal demands of the strikers. 1937 recorded 400 strikes. In 1938, the political leadership of the movement spearheaded the struggle against the big colonial companies while some form of accommodation

was sought with the small national capitalists in order to broaden the democratic front.

Trade-unions continued to be banned but workers and employees formed "friendly societies" or sports associations and reading clubs. A paper, *Lao Dong* (Labour), was the organ of the movement

In connection with that period, mention should be made of the activities, especially in Cochinchina, of a Trotskyite group whose influence was felt among politically inexperienced elements of the petty bourgeoisie lured by the leftist or extremist slogans of the Trotskyites. However, the anti-communism of the Trotskyite leaders found no echo among the members of basic organizations. Hostile to a policy of broad national union, the Trotskyites opposed the creation of "friendly societies" of workers and employees and tried to involve the masses in ill-advised strikes. Most of all, Trotskyism brought an element of division into the national and popular movement. It was not to survive when big confrontations took place.

In the villages, political activity also made big strides. Meetings and demonstrations multiplied beyond reckoning. On the occasion of major anniversaries, peasants in villages around the towns went to the provincial capitals to voice their claims or support demonstrations organized by the townspeople. Underground peasant unions were replaced by "friendly societies", associations of rice transplanters, reapers, house builders or even associations for funerals, for fishing, etc.; these associations drew large strata of the peasantry into multifarious political and social activities.

The Communist Party then launched the following program of action for the peasantry :

- Reduction of land rents, which must not exceed one-third of the crop.

- Exemption of land rents in case of crop failure.

- Equitable distribution of communal lands, which should not be put to auction.

- Freedom to reclaim waste lands and allotment of such lands to those who have reclaimed them. Handing over to the peasants of lands left waste by the owners.

- Setting up of branches of the Land Bank in the villages in order to grant low-interest loans to the peasants ; a ban on usury.

- Abrogation of the head-tax.

- Promulgation of elementary democratic liberties.

Meanwhile, numerous associations and "friendly societies" were set up everywhere, grouping women, the youth and members of various trades. An association for the popularization of *quoc ngu* (national script), mainly aimed at struggling against illiteracy, played an important part on the cultural front.

It was a period of political effervescence when the political parties played a much less important role than the mass organizations, because the various political parties of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie did not possess any real strength while the Communist Party remained practically underground, only some of its militants working in the open to animate the popular organizations. The Democratic Front, which was

founded to replace the Anti-imperialist Front, was in no way a grouping of parties like the French Popular Front, but a rallying of different social strata, political religious and cultural groups with a view to definite common actions. It even included the French sections of the Socialist Party in Hanoi and Saigon, which had begun to recruit members among the Vietnamese.

The situation in Viet Nam on the approach of the world war

From 1938 onward, the international situation evolved very rapidly; the fascist powers in Europe and in Asia, encouraged by the meekness and even the complicity of Western governments, switched to the offensive. The threat of war loomed. In early 1939, the Japanese occupied Hainan island, less than 300 kilometres from Haiphong, while in China their troops came close to the Indochinese frontier. What should be done in face of imminent Japanese aggression?

In France, the government of the Popular Front gave way to a rightwing government which, while preparing for war, devoted its efforts to liquidating the reforms achieved. As early as the beginning of 1939, repression resumed in Indochina with the colonialist clique seeking to abolish all democratic liberties. In 1938, the colonial administration floated a public loan of 40 million piastres allegedly to buy war material in France. Early in 1939, 10 million piastres of new taxes were levied to build air bases and finance other war preparations. The French government

decided that Indochina should supply France with 1.5 million soldiers and workers, or 15 times as many as during the 1914-18 war.

In October 1938, the Indochinese Communist Party, in a public manifesto, denounced France's and Great Britain's policy of compromise with the fascists, drew attention to the danger of Japanese aggression, and called on all parties, groups and social strata, including democratic Frenchmen to unite in the Indochinese Democratic Front in order to fight for freedom, peace, the daily interests of the working masses, and the defence of the country.

The campaign for the defence of Indochina against Japanese aggression was accompanied by the struggle against the big colonial interests, against the diversion manoeuvres of the colonial administration. The latter had in fact decided to merge Tonkin with Annam under the aegis of the Court of Hue, presenting this as a step toward a reunified Viet Nam, in an attempt to involve the population in the anti-Japanese defence. This manoeuvre, however, could deceive nobody: a big campaign was launched to convince the population that this operation could only lead to a further curtailment of the already scanty democratic liberties in Tonkin by putting this region under the sway of the monarchy completely controlled by the colonialists. The paper *Dan Chung* (The Masses), organ of the Communist Party published in Saigon, wrote that the road to the reunification of the country could not pass through the merging of Tonkin and Annam under the aegis of the monarchy, but through a long

and arduous struggle for democratic liberties, against the reactionary colonialists and Japanese aggression. Faced with this grim opposition, the colonial administration had to scrap the project.

Thus, at a time when the Second World War was about to break out, the Vietnamese popular masses displayed an intense political life and the Vietnamese people possessed a solidly organized and experienced political party. These factors were to play a decisive role in the future course of events. The situation was therefore much more favourable than that on the eve of the First World War.

V

**VIET NAM DURING WORLD WAR II.
THE AUGUST 1945 REVOLUTION**

(1939 — 1945)

The First Struggle

AT the beginning of the war, the colonial administration tried to reinforce the defensive potential of Indochina while mobilizing its human and material resources for the benefit of France. The Indochinese armed forces were increased to 100,000, the effectives of police and security services doubled. Towards the end of 1939, tens of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers and workers were sent to France.

A Supreme Economic Council was set up to control the economy. Paris ordered Indochina to supply France with 3.5 million tons of foodstuffs, 800,000 tons of tea, coffee and sugar, 30,000 tons of cable, 600,000 tons of rubber. Work-hours were increased from 48 to 60 hours a week for men and 54 for women. Heavier taxes and duties were imposed.

On the political plane, all supposedly "communist-inspired" activities were forbidden, all supposedly "communist-led" organizations dissolved and all "communist" propaganda literature seized. Even many Cao Dai sanctuaries were closed. Thousands of political prisoners and suspects were jailed and some deported to Madagascar. The most notorious prisons were Lao Bao, Nghia Lo, Poulo Condor. Governor-General Catroux declared that communism should be rooted out to ensure "peace" in Indochina and safeguard her "loyalty".

The fear felt by the colonial administration for the Communist Party — the only party to have maintained and developed its bases and worked out a comprehensive program — was not without reason. The Party having got ready to go underground, it suffered only insignificant losses. Most of its activities were transferred to the countryside where the colonial repressive machinery was comparatively weaker. However, its cadres remained active in the towns.

In November 1939, the Party Central Committee made an analysis of the situation and defined the tasks to be fulfilled:

— The 1939 war was merely an inter-imperialist war for a new division of the world.

— The essential task of the Vietnamese revolution was to overthrow imperialism, no matter what colour the skin of those who led it. National liberation was the prime objective. All other objectives, including the land problem, must remain subordinate to it.

— It was imperative to form an anti-imperialist United Front. The slogan of land reform was temporarily replaced by that of confiscating the lands of the traitor landlords; that of forming a democratic republican government was substituted for that of founding a worker-peasant government.

A new political line of great importance for the years to come was elaborated at that 6th plenary session of the Central Committee.

The French defeat in June 1940 plunged the colonialists in Indochina into confusion. All attempts to resist

Japanese aggression soon fizzled out. The colonial administration yielded to all Japanese demands. Control of the Sino-Vietnamese border fell into Japanese hands and the Japanese could land troops in Tonkin to attack the Chinese army from the rear. Japanese troops coming from Kwangsi (China) routed the French garrison in Lang Son, who fled to Hanoi by way of Bac Son.

Taking this opportunity, the Bac Son people rose up, disarmed the battered French soldiers and captured the Vo Nhai post, winning over a part of its garrison.

The colonial rulers, strongly opposed to the Vietnamese national popular movement, joined hands with the Japanese fascists who, hostile to the revolutionary movement and anxious to exploit to the utmost the resources of Indochina, sought to make full use of the French colonial administrative machinery. This collusion between the French colonialists and the Japanese fascists, aimed at checking the Vietnamese national movement, lasted till 1945.

The Lang Son incident was quickly settled between French and Japanese and the colonial administration could concentrate its forces to repress the Bac Son uprising. The insurgents took to the forests and formed the first guerilla nuclei led by the Communist Party.

In the south of Indochina, the French were faced with the demands of Thailand. With Japanese blessings, Thailand claimed areas of land northwest of the Cambodian great lakes and on the right bank of the Mekong River in Laos. Units of Vietnamese soldiers

were moved against the Thais. Some, based in Saigon, planned a mutiny in order not to be sent to the front. This project was in agreement with the program elaborated by the Cochinchina Party Committee which had been actively preparing for an insurrection since 1940. A plan of action was worked out to combine the mutiny with actions by worker-peasant organizations all over Cochinchina.

The insurrection broke out on the night of November 23, 1940. Unfortunately, the colonial administration, having got wind of the plot, had disarmed the rebellion-prone units, and so the Saigon uprising failed to take place. However, insurrections broke out in no less than 8 provinces (out of 20) in Cochinchina. In My Tho province 54 out of 100 villages took part. Here, the gold-starred red flag, which was to be the national flag of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, made its first appearance. With the tacit consent of the Japanese, the insurrection was subjected to barbarous repression. Many villages were razed to the ground, over 20,000 people arrested and killed.

Another uprising took place on January 13, 1941, at Do Luong, Nghe An province. A garrison mutinied and marched on Vinh, the provincial town, but was quickly dispersed by French troops.

So, in the first year of the Second World War, the Vietnamese people, under the leadership of the Communist Party, made clear their determination to win back independence by means of revolutionary violence. Though falling short of success, the first engagements constituted a valuable experience. It was proved that

one could not count mainly on the cooperation of the soldiers in the colonial army, but should prepare the entire people, politically and militarily, for the struggle for power to be waged at a propitious moment.

The Franco-Japanese double yoke

From 1941 to 1945 Viet Nam was subjected to a Franco-Japanese double yoke. The French and the Japanese combined their efforts to exploit the country's resources to the utmost, maintain "law and order", and suppress the revolutionary movement. This collusion, however, did not keep them from pursuing each their own policies to consolidate their respective positions in anticipation of eventual confrontations. Economic exploitation was stepped up to meet both French interests and the requirements of the Japanese war economy. Patriotic movements were repressed with increasing violence while political manoeuvres multiplied in an attempt to hoodwink public opinion and rally reactionary or politically inexperienced Vietnamese elements.

Admiral Decoux, appointed Governor-General of Indochina by the Vichy Government, carried out a double-faced policy of dictatorship and demagoguery. At the end of 1940, the few councils which had been set up to give the colonial regime a semblance of democracy were dismissed and all powers fell into the hands of the Governor-General, especially into those of the

all-powerful security services. The Decoux administration did its best to launch a cultural movement to promote allegiance to France and reactionary conceptions inspired by Petainism and Confucianism. New schools were opened and enrolment after 1942 increased from 450,000 to 700,000. Money was raised to build the Hanoi Students' Quarters, and Vietnamese mandarins, landowners and bourgeois were encouraged to set up funds to help needy students. The colonial administration strove to seize control of the anti-illiteracy movement until then in the hands of the patriots. It held literary competitions, art exhibitions, gave prizes and sought by all means to enhance French culture.

A particular attempt was made to establish political control over the youth by grouping them into sports associations, para-military and boy-scout organizations. Civil servants were allowed to engage in sports activities on week-ends. A few favours were granted them: increase in salaries and allowances, transfer of certain categories to a metropolitan regime, promotion to higher posts.

The youth and civil servants were even allowed to speak of "patriotism", so long as it was a "local patriotism" within the framework of loyalty to France.

All these measures by no means changed the nature of French policy: complete submission to the Japanese occupier and brutal crack-down on the national movement.

The French had had to agree to the stationing of Japanese troops in Tonkin and to cede 70,000 square

kilometers to Thailand, an ally of Japan. The so-called joint defence treaty concluded on December 9, 1941, put the whole of Indochina under Japanese control. Indochina then became a Japanese military base and a supplier of raw materials to the Japanese economy.

First, the French colonial administration supplied Japan with rice: 585,000 tons in 1941, 973,000 tons in 1942, 1,023,000 tons in 1943, 900,000 tons in 1944. At the beginning, Japan paid in gold or industrial goods, but Japanese reserves were quickly exhausted and after December 1942, she paid in "special yen", a sort of worthless military bonds.

In fact, it was the colonial administration that helped cover Japanese war expenditures by putting more and more bank-notes into circulation: 723 million piastres, that is 7 times as much as the 1939 Indochinese budget. In 1944, the total of paper currency in circulation increased to 1,052 million (216 in 1939). As a result, prices spiralled upward.

To meet Japanese needs, the colonial administration stored up a whole range of products: cement, jute, sugar, oil, coal... by monopolizing the sale and purchase of a great number of goods. Meanwhile there was a lack of raw materials, equipment and transport to keep the economy going. Only the big colonial firms got huge profits from the new current of exchange with Japan. For them the French surrender to the Japanese was a paying proposition.

The heaviest burden for the people was the compulsory sale of rice to the administration. Even Tonkin,

where food was tragically scarce, had to supply 130,205 tons in 1943; 186,130 tons in 1944. Whether the crop was good or bad, each region had to supply a quantity of rice in proportion to the tilled acreage at the derisory price of 19 piastres a quintal. In lean years, the people had to buy rice on the market at 54 piastres a quintal to meet those obligations. To provide gunny bags to the Japanese economy, the peasants were forced to root up rice plants on vast areas and plant jute instead.

In 1944, when the transportation of coal to Saigon was cut off by US bombing, the French and the Japanese used rice and maize as fuel for power stations. They vied with each other in storing up rice. During that time, agriculture was not improved. Dams and dykes were neglected. The slightest natural calamity caused food shortages which developed into horrible famines. Starting in 1943, famine became more and more serious from 1944 onward.

While joining hands with the French administration to exploit to the utmost the resources of the country and harshly repress all revolutionary activity, the Japanese conducted demagogic manoeuvres. They dangled the bait of "national independence" to be won for Viet Nam with Japanese help within the framework of Asian solidarity against the whites and of a co-prosperity zone in Greater Eastern Asia. In particular, they sought to recruit lackeys, either individuals like Tran Trong Kim, Ngo Dinh Diem, Nguyen Van Sam, or tiny groups like the Dai Viet clique in Tonkin. However, until the end of the war,

it was more important for Japan to maintain "law and order" with French help than to back any group of puppets. When the French reacted too strongly, the Japanese preferred to send their agents away, to avoid clashes. Even in 1944, after the fall of the Vichy Government in France, they carried on this policy.

The birth of Viet Minh

The people were writhing under the Franco-Japanese double yoke. From 1940 to 1944, prices increased by 400%, wages only 20%. In Tonkin and Annam, the peasants starved; in Cochinchina, goods were so scarce millions of people went about in rags, even clad in leaves. Dissatisfaction mounted among rich peasants and landlords, compelled to sell their products cheap, and among businessmen and industrialists, who lacked raw materials and equipment and were pressed down by Government monopolies. The only ones to profit were the big colonial companies, black-market-eers and professional speculators.

Whereas some patriots at first had harboured illusions about a possible Japanese aid, the Communist Party had the merit of denouncing the Japanese danger and steering the struggle along the right course. In May 1941, Ho Chi Minh convened at Pac Bo (Cao Bang province) the 8th plenary session of the Party which put the Vietnamese revolution unreservedly in the world anti-fascist camp, of which the keystone remained the Soviet Union. The plenum held that Hitlerite fascism would attack the Soviet Union and

this would certainly end in its own annihilation. The world war would end with the formation of new socialist countries. It was in this perspective that the strategy of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement was to be defined.

The present essential task was to liberate the country from Franco-Japanese domination, which was bearing hard on the entire people; national liberation must be put above all other things; the interests of all social classes must be subordinated to this primary objective. Broad national union should be achieved against French colonialism and Japanese fascism and a national front be established to rally all social classes and strata, parties, political and religious groups. Lands belonging to the imperialists and traitors should be confiscated and distributed to poor peasants, land rents reduced and communal lands equitably distributed, all these measures to be progressively applied with a view to realizing this slogan: land to the tillers. Thus, national unity could be achieved without the poor peasants' fundamental interests being neglected.

The Central Committee decided to prepare for an armed insurrection and for this purpose to reinforce guerilla and self-defence units and to set up guerilla bases.

"The war in the Pacific and the resistance of the Chinese people to Japanese aggression," the resolution of the plenary session declared, "will develop in a way favourable to the Indochinese revolution. At the right moment, with our forces ready, we shall be able

to launch partial insurrections, and secure victories in various areas to pave the way for a general uprising."

Truong Chinh was appointed Secretary-General of the Party.

On those bases was founded the Viet Minh front (abbreviation of *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh*) which rallied workers', peasants', youth, women's organizations and guerilla units operating in the highlands. These national salvation organizations rallied all social strata, including the bourgeoisie and the landlords as long as they agreed to fight against French and Japanese imperialism. The Viet Minh adopted the gold-starred red flag as emblem.

The Viet Minh quickly gained popularity among the labouring classes writhing under the Franco-Japanese double yoke. This yoke also brought about a profound polarization among the bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and students, who swung away from pro-Japanese and pro-French groups and gravitated towards the Viet Minh.

In 1943 a group of intellectuals and bourgeois founded the Democratic Party to rally part of the national bourgeoisie. That Party adhered to the Viet Minh. The same year, the Communist Party launched a programme of action in the cultural field which aroused great interest among the intellectuals. A Cultural Association for National Salvation was founded and affiliated to the Viet Minh. Then a Military Association for National Salvation was formed, rallying all patriotic elements in the colonial army. As the war went on

and Franco-Japanese contradictions grew more acute, the Viet Minh exercised increasing influence upon the masses. It also tried to win over democratic Frenchmen opposed to Japanese occupation and to the Vichy Government.

The Viet Minh not only elaborated a programme but also stirred the people to action, both military and political.

On the military front, the guerillas who had launched the 1940 Bac Son Insurrection and had had to scatter or take refuge among the people, also stepped up their political activities while trying to set up armed units. A new form of action came into being: "armed propaganda". In 1943, these forces were big enough to form the Bac Son - Vu Nhai base from where they pushed towards Thai Nguyen and Bac Kan provinces and even Vinh Yen in the Midlands. By the end of 1943 Viet Minh "armed propaganda units" were operating in a vast region embracing several provinces in the Highlands, north of the Red River.

In 1944, a truly liberated zone took shape in those provinces. Guerilla bases came into being in Central Annam and Cochinchina. In the border provinces of Cao Bang and Lang Son mass organizations got ready for an insurrection. Ho Chi Minh, back from China, thought the slogan premature, called off the insurrection and ordered the stepping up of political activities. In December 1944, an "army for propaganda and liberation" was formed (the name was used to stress the political character of its activities). Vo Nguyen Giap was made its commander. On December 24 and

25, 1944, it overran the Phay Khat and Na Ngan posts. Thus began a glorious history.

Along with the armed struggle which developed in the Highlands, in the plains and in the towns the people's struggle gained momentum. The Viet Minh encouraged the peasants to oppose the orders to root up rice and plant jute instead. Starting in 1943, in many villages, the peasants—men, women, and children—armed with sticks and forks, opposed the destruction of rice crops.

Another slogan was to oppose the forced sale of rice: led by the Viet Minh, the peasants put up a fierce opposition to the French and the Japanese. In the villages, drum-beats stirred the people to fight against the requisitioning of rice with whatever means available, pitting picks and axes against the guns of Franco-Japanese troops.

In the towns, the workers and other labouring people stepped up their struggle. A Workers' Association for National Salvation was set up. It staged strikes and demonstrations to demand higher wages and an end to ill treatment. The workers' struggle gave a great impulse to the activities of intellectuals and students.

Against the background of this seething struggle, De Gaulle's December 8, 1943, promise to "liberate Indochina" found no echo.

The great turning point : 1945

By the beginning of 1945, the defeat of the Axis became obvious ; the Vichy Government fell. The

Japanese suffered defeat after defeat in China as well as in the Pacific. In Indochina, the Gaullists, particularly the military, were thinking of preserving the colonial regime. On February 8, 1945, speaking in Brazzaville, De Gaulle promised some autonomy to Indochina. The new French Government was to use French troops to safeguard the French presence in the Far East. The Japanese found themselves in a predicament, faced with an ever-developing revolutionary movement and a possible French volte-face. However, the Japanese stole a march on the French. On March 9, 1945, they disarmed them after meeting only a faint resistance. The colonial "edifice" collapsed overnight. Meanwhile, famine was raging. The requisitioning and hoarding of rice, and unbridled speculations had considerably worsened an already precarious situation. The masses were seething with anger. The Viet Minh called upon the people's forces to step up guerrilla warfare, and upon the peasants to seize Japanese rice-stores.

The pro-Japanese parties, the Dai Viet in particular, tried to convince the population of Japanese "generosity", of the myth of an "independence" won back with Japanese help, and to get support for the slogans put forward by the Japanese: economic co-operation, national independence, military alliance to form a Greater Eastern Asia. This propaganda had no effect upon the population, whose sympathy was with the Viet Minh. The declaration of independence by King Bao Dai annulling all the treaties concluded with France and establishing an alliance with Japan did

not change the situation in the least. At long last, the Japanese and Bao Dai succeeded in finding a Prime Minister, Tran Trong Kim. The Tran Trong Kim government, formed on April 17 with the participation of a few intellectuals, was completely powerless in face of the problems of the day. Famine continued to play havoc, no new institution was set up, political amnesty was denied to "communists", i. e. mine out of ten prisoners. A decree dated June 13 threatened with a death sentence anyone attacking communication lines, rice-stores, warehouses, and forbade all gatherings of more than 10 people. Another, dated July 15, prohibited all political activities by trade-unions. Thus, the Tran Trong Kim government revealed itself as an agent of the Japanese.

The Viet Minh for its part warned the people, the petty bourgeoisie in particular, against any illusion of winning back independence through negotiations with the Japanese or through the Bao Dai-Tran Trong Kim puppet government. On the night of March 9, while the Japanese troops disarmed the French, the Communist Party's Central Committee met at Dinh Bang, 30km from Hanoi, made a accurate analysis of the situation and came to extremely important resolutions.

Without underestimating the possibility of a French comeback, it held that the principal enemy was now Japanese fascism. However, while the French administration had collapsed, the one in the service of the Japanese did not function as yet. The world war entered a decisive phase. A Japanese defeat was imminent.

In the country, the people, who were starving and seething with hatred for the occupier, demanded action. A pre-revolutionary atmosphere prevailed. The time had come for the Party and the Viet Minh front to prepare the masses for a general insurrection to seize power.

The pre-insurrectional mobilization of the masses consisted of three essential aspects :

- Development of guerilla activities in the Highlands and Midlands ;
- Capture of rice-stores by the peasants ;
- Political agitation in the major towns.

Under the leadership of a National Liberation Committee, liberation committees, the first form of revolutionary power, were set up at different levels : village, district and province. In April, the revolutionary armed force merged into a "Liberation Army" under the command of a Military Committee among whose members were Vo Nguyen Giap, Chu Van Tan, Van Tien Dung. A military school was founded.

After March 9, guerilla units overran important posts in Thai Nguyen, Bac Can, Tuyen Quang provinces. In the North, Centre and South, political prisoners who had escaped from prison set about organizing the population in the surrounding areas. Traitors were punished, revolutionary power was established in many localities and regions. By June 1945, most of the six provinces north of the Red River, (Lang Son, Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Ha Giang, Tuyen quang, Thai Nguyen) were liberated and served as the main revolutionary base

of the country. The guerilla forces laid ambushes and inflicted serious losses upon the Japanese troops. In Hai Duong and Quang Yen provinces, uprisings took place in some localities and revolutionary power was set up.

In the Centre, an armed insurrection took place in Ba To, Quang Ngai province.

While guerilla warfare was developing, in Tonkin and the northern provinces of Annam, famine took on unprecedentedly tragic proportions: within a few months, two million people died of starvation. Many villages lost half or one-third of their population; in the towns, the streets were littered with dead bodies. The Viet Minh called on the people to count neither on the Japanese nor on the puppet government but on their own efforts, and urged them to capture Japanese rice-stocks and convoys of supplies. This resulted in large-scale mobilization of the people, who grew conscious of their strength. Self-defence units and liberation committees were formed in the course of this struggle. Rice stocks were seized and distributed to the population, thus lessening the havoc of famine. This was really a pre-revolutionary action.

In the towns—Hanoi, Saigon and Huê in particular—political agitation gained momentum. In Hanoi, though the Town Party Committee was, in the period from 1941 to 1945, five times broken up by the police, each factory, in 1945, had its own workers' organization for national salvation. Self-defence units were formed. Strikes were staged in big factories; meetings, at which orators spoke under armed protection, were

held in streets, schools, factories and city outskirts. Pro-Japanese meetings were turned into ones supporting the revolution. Isolated Japanese soldiers were disarmed and traitors punished in the very heart of the city. Peasants in the neighbourhood of Hanoi, acting in concert with workers, seized rice-stores.

In Saigon, after March 9, the workers' organizations had a membership of 120,000 (3,000 before that date). The Vanguard Youth, led by such well-known intellectuals as Dr. Pham Ngoc Thach and lawyer Thai Van Lung had, in Saigon alone, a membership of 200,000 and of one million all over Cochinchina.

The August Revolution

In the summer of 1945, throughout the country, in the North, South and Centre, in the countryside and in the towns, and also among the ethnic minorities of the mountain areas, popular effervescence was at its height and revolutionary activities, both political and military, were on the increase. The decisive factor was that the Viet Minh was leading and coordinating all these activities on a nation-wide scale.

On August 13, after the destruction of its Kwantung army by the Soviet Army and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered. The same day, a National Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party decided to put forward these slogans:

— Put an end to foreign aggression;

- Wrest back national independence ;
- Set up people's power.

Instructions were issued to combine political and military activities, to demoralize the enemy, to persuade him to surrender and to concentrate efforts on the most important centres.

On August 16, the Viet Minh held a National Congress attended by delegates of various parties and organizations, and different ethnic and religious groups. The Congress decided "*to wrest power from the hands of the Japanese and the puppet government before the arrival of the allied troops in Indochina, so that we, as masters of the country, would welcome these troops coming to disarm the Japanese.*" The question was to forestall the "Allied powers" (Chiang Kai-shek, the British, French and Americans) which intended to occupy Indochina, each pursuing its own interest.

The Congress adopted a 10-point program :

1. To seize power, found a Democratic Republic of Viet Nam on the basis of total independence.
2. To arm the people. To strengthen the Liberation Army.
3. To confiscate the property of the imperialists and the traitors and either to nationalize or to distribute it to the poor.
4. To abolish French and Japanese-imposed taxes, and to replace them by a just and light tax policy.
5. To proclaim the people's fundamental rights :
 - Human rights.
 - Right to ownership

— Civil rights : universal suffrage, democratic liberties, equality among all ethnic groups and between man and woman.

6. To equitably distribute communal lands, reduce land-rents and interest rates, decree a moratorium of debts, and give help to victims of calamities.

7. To promulgate labour legislation: an 8-hour working day, minimum wages, social security.

8. To build up an independent national economy, develop agriculture, set up a National Bank.

9. To build a national education system: elimination of illiteracy, compulsory elementary education. To build a new culture.

10. To establish friendly relations with the Allied powers and the countries fighting for their independence.

A National Liberation Committee was set up, acting as a provisional government headed by Ho Chi Minh, who issued a stirring appeal:

"The decisive hour for the destiny of our nation has struck! Let all of us rise up and strive to liberate ourselves. Many peoples in the world are standing up to wrest back their independence. We must not lag behind.

"Forward! Under the banner of the Viet Minh, march courageously forward!"

Soon, the Liberation Army liberated Thai Nguyen. Everywhere, people's organizations, guerilla and self-defence units moved into action. A revolutionary

tidal wave swept the country. From August 14 to 25, in every village, in every town the people stood up, and, supported by armed units, attacked administrative centres. The local authorities either fled or surrendered power to the revolutionary forces. Most of the demoralized Japanese and puppet troops laid down their arms. Only a few provincial towns could not be liberated: Lai Chau, occupied by a strong French column coming back from China where it had sought refuge at the time of the Japanese *coup de force*; Mong Cai, Ha Giang, Lao Cai on the Sino-Vietnamese border, occupied by Chiang Kai-shek agents.

In the three major towns, Hanoi, Huê and Saigon, the quick victory of the insurrection was of the greatest importance. In Hanoi, pro-Japanese elements, in an attempt to oppose the revolutionary movement, set up a "Committee for National Liberation" but failed to rally the people. On August 17, a meeting held by the Federation of Civil Servants to support the puppet government was turned into a huge mass rally in favour of the Viet Minh; a general strike was staged; on August 19, more than 100,000 people took to the streets, and the puppet government had to resign and surrender power the revolutionaries.

Huê was the capital of the monarchy and of the pro-Japanese puppet government. To avoid bloodshed, the Viet Minh persuaded Bao Dai to abdicate and his prime minister Tran Trong Kim to resign. The reactionaries, wanting to cling to power, asked the Japanese for a 5,000-strong guard. To frustrate the scheme, the

people of Huê and of the neighbouring villages, supported by armed units, took to the streets and occupied various ministries. It was August 23. Bao Dai agreed to abdicate; the Tran Trong Kim cabinet collapsed. On the 25th, a delegation of the people's government, coming from Hanoi and headed by Tran Huy Lieu, received from the hands of Bao Dai the dynastic seal and sword, the symbols of royal power. Bao Dai became the citizen Vinh Thuy.

In Cochinchina, the pro-Japanese had set up a United National Front on August 14. The delegate of the king, Nguyen Van Sam, sent from Huê, asked the Japanese to arm the Front, but it soon collapsed under the pressure of the people. On August 25, one million people in Saigon and the outlying districts, protected by armed groups, took to the streets and set up revolutionary power.

Throughout the country, the insurrection had won complete victory.

The August 1945 Revolution ended 80 years of colonial domination, abolished the monarchy and restored Viet Nam's national independence. A telling blow at the colonial system, it ushered in, together with other movements in the world, a period of break-down of colonial empires.

In its development, the August Revolution was characterized by a judicious combination of political struggle with armed struggle, one supporting the other, priority being given one form or the other according to the situation. It proved the political maturity

and the capacities of the masses for action, the able leadership of the Viet Minh Front and the Communist Party. Victory was the outcome of sound leadership, which had taken the right course at the right time and worked out forms of struggle that were best suited to each period and each locality. It was also the result of long-term preparations, both political and military, starting right after the outbreak of the Second World War, preparations that had brought about a solid national unity on the basis of a close worker-peasant alliance and succeeded in inspiring the people with a fighting spirit capable of withstanding any trial.

VI

**THE FOUNDING OF THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
OF VIET NAM**

(1945—1946)

AFTER the triumph of the August Revolution, brought to power by an irresistible revolutionary tide, the insurrectional Provisional Government presented itself before the people in Ba Dinh square in Hanoi on September 2, 1945. Before a huge and enthusiastic crowd President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of the country :

“The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered us, and have won independence for the Fatherland. Viet Nam has the right to be free and independent and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property, in order to safeguard their freedom and independence.”

Independence and freedom! After 80 years of colonial domination these words aroused immense fervour among the millions of Vietnamese. Now that their fatherland was again an independent state, everybody felt that a new era had begun and all, either poor or rich, Communist or Confucianist, Buddhist or Christian, peasant or worker, people of the mountains or of the plains, intellectual or manual workers, were ready to sacrifice their lives for the defence of that independence which was being threatened from all

sides. Indeed, the situation was extremely precarious ; famine was rife, the state coffers were empty, in the North Chiang Kai-shek troops were to occupy the country while in the South British-French troops were about to land. Viet Nam was alone, no allied or friendly country could give her any help. The DRVN government had no previous economic, administrative, military or diplomatic experience ; its only assets were the close unity cementing all strata of the population, the determination of the entire people to fight, and the just and clear-sighted leadership of a Marxist-Leninist party.

As early as September 2nd, the Viet Minh Central Committee stressed :

" Our independence is still fragile. To seize power is difficult, but to maintain it is still more so. "

And the Provisional Government issued this call :

" In this hour, let everybody devote his thoughts and his actions to the struggle for independence against foreign aggression. Only by so doing can we break the yoke of serfdom and escape annihilation. "

Creation of a people's national democratic state

People's power was to be the key factor in safeguarding independence and promoting national revolution. While the anti-imperialist task, the defence of national independence, took pride of place, the democratic task was no less important. One had to consolidate

national unity while mobilizing the immense energy of the labouring masses, and build ever closer ties between the revolutionary power and the people. Against the imperialists who assailed the country one had to oppose a united and solid front, a determined people, an inflexible will, and at the same time most supple tactics. In domestic affairs many urgent tasks came to the fore: struggle against famine, broadening of the national front, pressing democratic reforms, consolidation of the people's state, immediate struggle against illiteracy.

The famine of 1944 was not yet checked when in 1945 an unprecedented flood submerged the most populated provinces of the Red River delta. Then came a protracted drought. Manpower, cattle and seeds were scarce, about 250,000 hectares could not be sown, a third of the November crop—the most important of the year—was lost. Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces even lost 50 per cent of their crops. One could not get rice from the South, because the French had reoccupied Saigon since September 23.

Famine was the hardest trial for the people's power. As early as September 3rd, President Ho Chi Minh had launched a double campaign against famine: a campaign of mutual aid and solidarity, and one for the intensification of production.

Fired by the enthusiasm born of recovered independence, roused by immense patriotic fervour, millions of people, following President Ho Chi Minh's example, saved the least bit of food and shared their

rations with the disinherited. The tiniest plot of land was put under cultivation. Short-term crops such as sweet potatoes and vegetables were planted in every available place, even in public parks, while each family kept a relief rice jar and groups of volunteers scoured the country to collect supplies. The harvest of subsidiary food crops in late 1945 and early 1946 showed a leap forward :

230,000 tons of sweet potatoes as against	65,000 in 1938-43
220,000 tons of maize as against	56,000 in 1938-43
60,000 tons of soya as against	26,000 in 1938-43
(these figures are for Bac Bo only, i.e. Tonkin)	

Meanwhile, the dykes were repaired on over 1,200 km., which had required 11 million work-days and the moving of 2 million cubic metres of earth.

For the first time in Viet Nam's history, a government had been able to eradicate famine through active measures; the mobilization of the popular masses gave a bumper crop in the summer of 1946 after the success of the last winter-spring crop. Famine was curbed then checked. After this great trial, the entire people felt deeply attached to the revolutionary power which had proved its organizational ability and its devotion to the people.

The struggle against famine did not prevent the government from waging another battle on a nationwide scale, that against illiteracy. On September 8, the Department of Popular Education was set up; nearly 100,000 people volunteered as instructors and over 70,000 classes were organized in pagodas, village halls, temples, factories, hospitals, in the shade of

banyan trees, in market places, on paddy dykes, etc. Old folks sat beside youths to learn to read and write; even children became tutors for their parents and grand-parents. Within a year, from September 1945 to September 1946, while large numbers of foreign troops still remained in the country and the struggle against famine required considerable efforts, two million and a half people had learned to read and write. At the same time, bases for a national education were laid down; in particular, the Vietnamese language, which had been shoved in the background throughout the colonial period, became the vehicle used at all levels, higher education included.

Right in its first year, the new power had thus won two great battles and stood the test, having fulfilled to the letter the revolutionary program long dreamt of by patriots: to provide the people with rice and education.

This mobilization of energies could only be accomplished on the basis of a broad national union. After the triumph of the revolution, the Viet Minh Front was enlarged and consolidated, rallying new people's organizations and new personalities: patriotic associations of traders and industrialists, Buddhists, students, functionaries... Particular importance was attached to cementing union between various nationalities and religions. On December 8, 1945, delegates of 20 nationalities coming from all corners of the country met in Hanoi to assert the principles of union, equality and mutual aid between all ethnic groups. Representatives of various religions — Buddhists,

Caodaists, Hoa Hao believers, Christians—also voiced their adherence to those principles, thus cementing the common will to defend independence and build a new Viet Nam.

In 1946, to achieve the largest possible union, the Lien Viet Front was founded. The national united front constituted the direct support of the organs of power at all levels, its foundation remaining the alliance of workers and peasants. On this basis, the building of people's power was carried on and state organs were rapidly installed.

On September 8, President Ho Chi Minh signed a decree providing for the election of a National Assembly. The election campaign turned into a vast movement to consolidate the revolutionary power in face of the manoeuvres of the imperialists, especially of the French colonialists whose armed forces had landed in Saigon as early as September 23. This was the first general election in the country's history. Every citizen upwards of 18 enjoyed the right to vote, and voting was regarded as a personal contribution to the safeguarding of threatened national independence, particularly in the South where the French troops had begun their operations of reconquest.

On January 6, 1946, the entire people went to the polls; in the South, despite repression by the French colonialists, over 90 per cent of the population voted. The great majority of the electors opted for the candidates of the Viet Minh, the architect of the reconquest of independence. Thus the Vietnamese people clearly confirmed their support to the Viet Minh and

their confidence in the government presided over by Ho Chi Minh to whom went 98 per cent of the Hanoi votes. More than 300 deputies belonging to various social strata, political parties, ethnic and religious groups, were elected. The National Assembly expressed full confidence in the Ho Chi Minh government. All the counter-revolutionary manoeuvres aimed at undermining the authority of the revolutionary government failed. The Ho Chi Minh government remained the only genuine representative of the Vietnamese nation, vested with the people's confidence, holding legitimate power and having proved its capabilities in two major fields, the struggle against famine and that against illiteracy. Against it the imperialists could only line up tiny groups gathering unknown placemen, without any credit among the population and often with a patent record of treason.

At the local level, the authorities of the old regime, mandarins and notables, in nearly all provinces, districts and villages, had handed over power to the insurrectionists at the outbreak of the August Revolution. A new decree, bearing the number 63, set up at every echelon elected people's committees, which then elected an administrative committee for each locality. Thus, from the capital down to every village, people's power was established, took public affairs in hand and administered them efficiently with the people's confidence and support.

The new government immediately set to work, devoting itself especially to carrying out a series of democratic reforms, strengthening the people's armed forces, and ensuring healthy and independent finances.

In the social field, one had to meet the legitimate claims of the peasants and the workers while preserving national union. Strategically, the two tasks, the anti-imperialist and the anti-feudal, were linked together, but tactically they could be carried out at different tempos. The safeguarding of national independence then took pride of place and the democratic reforms, albeit substantial, did not take on a radical character.

In the agrarian field, an equitable distribution of communal lands, which covered nearly 12 per cent of the tilled acreage in the whole country, was effected. Land rent was reduced by 25 per cent and many debts could be cancelled. The lands confiscated from the colonialists and traitors were allotted to the poor peasants, on a provisional basis. The peasants acquired the right to reclaim waste or virgin lands and to become owners of these lands.

A social legislation was promulgated: eight-hour working day, trade-union liberty, right to strike. Enterprises of national import with absentee owners were nationalized or requisitioned and the workers acquired the right to participate in their management. Many public enterprises and workshops were opened which gave jobs to many of the unemployed.

Head-tax and the forced buying of opium and alcohol and the salt monopoly instituted by the colonial administration were abolished.

At the start, the new State had only 1,250,720 piastres in its coffers. The Bank of Indochina, a bank of issue, had escaped the control of the insurrection

during the August Revolution, but it had nevertheless to execute the payment orders of the Vietnamese government. However, on October 23, 1945, the Bank stopped all payments, in the hope of causing a financial crisis which would be catastrophic for the people's power. In the very first days, the government had launched among the population a vast fund-raising campaign in which gold, precious objects and money were collected to defray the most urgent expenses; all social strata had enthusiastically responded and the civil servants worked for several months without pay. But an independent currency had to be issued at all costs.

On January 31, 1946, a decree was promulgated providing for the issue of Vietnamese *dongs*, first in Central Viet Nam, then, by the end of 1946, throughout the country. What was the security for this currency? The government had neither gold nor foreign currency reserves; the Vietnamese state was not yet recognized by any country nor did it have any foreign trade relation as yet. This paper money was supported by the patriotism of the popular masses, their confidence in the government and their will to preserve national independence. The *dong* was exchanged at par with the Indochinese piastre. The first step for building an independent national economy was made.

All those urgent political, social and financial tasks did not prevent the new State from discharging its foremost duty at that time: to safeguard independence at all costs. Therefore, the greatest attention was

paid to the building up of the armed forces, both a regular army and regional and local self-defence forces.

Hardly born, the Vietnamese people's democratic State was thus sufficiently armed in every respect to fare the trials ahead.

Struggle against Chiang Kai-shek's plots

The danger came mainly from external forces. By virtue of the armistice agreements, Indochina was occupied by Chiang Kai-shek troops north of the 16th parallel, and south of that line by British troops, who set about preparing for the return of the French.

Behind the 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek troops led by General Lu Han loomed American imperialism, and coming in their waggon were tiny groups of politicians and adventurers, debris of old nationalist parties, which Chiang Kai-shek sought to force upon the Vietnamese people as puppet rulers. In some provincial capitals near the China-Viet Nam border (Lao Cai, Lang Son, Quang Yen) Chiang Kai-shek troops and men of the tiny Viet Cach and Viet Quoc nationalist groups had eliminated the revolutionary power and set up puppet organs. However, it was not easy for these troops to overthrow the revolutionary government supported by the entire people. Yet they demanded a Cabinet reshuffle and even the resignation of President Ho Chi Minh in favour of

Bao Dai. At the end of December 1945, General Lu Han sent the government an ultimatum asking for the recall of Communist ministers, the handing over of the administration to the nationalist reactionaries, the outright allotment to the latter of 80 seats in the National Assembly (even before the elections took place) and the replacement of the national flag. Meanwhile, the Viet Quoc and the Viet Cach groups sought to win over bourgeois and feudal landowners and rally agents of the French and the Japanese in order to sow discord amidst the national united front and cause disturbances. They kidnapped and murdered men of the government, and liquidated French people, then accused the Viet Minh of being the instigator. They demanded seven ministries: interior, national defence, finance, economy, youth, education, overseas Vietnamese and foreign nationals, and the posts of Prime Minister and Chief of Staff. All these disturbances were kicked up and demands made at the very moment when the French troops had begun their attempts at reconquest of the South.

It was easy to struggle against these tiny groups for they had no popular backing, but to their masters, the Chiang Kai-shek men, one had to oppose a policy that was both intransigent in principle and flexible in practice. Of the two imperialisms, France was the more dangerous enemy because Chiang Kai-shek, threatened in his own country by a revolution in full swing, had little chance of being able to launch a direct attack on Viet Nam. Lu Han's 200,000 men, however, constituted a permanent danger for the new Vietnamese state.

One had to avoid direct conflicts with these troops while checking their intervention in the internal policy of the country by mobilizing the masses for a political struggle each time they tried to encroach upon our national sovereignty. As for the Viet Cach and the Viet Quoc, their sabotage acts and crimes were denounced before public opinion and punished if need be, but they were also offered political concessions. Asked to present their own candidates for the general elections and anticipating defeat, they rejected the proposal but agreed to send 70 of their men to the National Assembly, as demanded by General Lu Han. Under the pressure of Chiang Kai-shek troops, in January 1946, the government had to appoint Nguyen Hai Than, of the Viet Cach, Vice-President of the Republic, and Nguyen Tuong Tam, of the Viet Quoc, Foreign Minister. All the counter-revolutionary acts of these tiny groups were to no avail, for everywhere the population rejected them and power at all levels was well in the hands of the revolutionaries.

French aggression in Nam Bo

In the summer of 1945, the French government took a series of urgent measures in an attempt at reestablishing French sovereignty in Indochina after the Japanese defeat. On August 16, it despatched to Indochina the "Massu" detachment and the 9th division of colonial infantry with General Leclerc as Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Corps and Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu — a religious — as French High

Commissioner in Indochina. The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Southeast Asia, Mounbatten, did all he could to speed up the sending of French troops to Indochina, for British imperialism, concerned about the future of British colonies in Asia, was eager to see France reestablish her domination in Indochina.

On August 23, a number of Frenchmen including Cédile, delegate of the High Commissioner, were parachuted in Nam Bo; Cédile was allowed by the Japanese to contact the French in Saigon (the insurrection had not yet broken out in this city). On August 29, Cédile contacted the Nam Bo Revolutionary Committee to inform it that France recognized neither Viet Nam's independence nor her unity. The Committee answered him that Viet Nam had won back both her independence and unity and that the Vietnamese people would not recognize any form of colonial administration. On September 2, during the big popular demonstration for independence, French colonialists and their agents hidden in a church opened fire at the crowd, killing and wounding 47 people.

In the first days of September, British-Indian troops landed in Saigon; they released thousands of Frenchmen who had been detained since the Japanese *coup de force* and gave them weapons. Confident of British protection, these Frenchmen indulged in many provocations. On September 13, British troops occupied the offices of the Nam Bo Committee, let the French hoist the tricolour and allowed French troops to relieve the Japanese in some places. In face of these provocations, on September 19, the Nam Bo Administrative

Committee called on the population to stand ready to oppose armed resistance to any attempt at reconquest by the French. The same day, Cédile declared that "order" had to be reestablished and a "government" set up in conformity with De Gaulle's statement of March 23, 1945.

On September 20, British General Gracey banned all Vietnamese papers. The next day he instituted a curfew and ordered the disbandment of the Vietnamese security forces and the handing over of their weapons. The order was naturally ignored. Gracey then freed and rearmed 1,400 French prisoners of war, who carried out many provocations, occupying several police stations on Sept. 22. On the night of that day, the French launched their attack on Saigon. A war of reconquest began. The Nam Bo Administrative Committee immediately called on the population to riposte. The motto: "Independence or death!" appeared everywhere. On September 26, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed:

"The Government and our compatriots throughout the country will do their utmost to support the fighters and people of the South who are fighting selflessly and making sacrifices in their struggle to maintain national independence."

Units of the people's army were immediately sent to Nam Bo.

From August 25, date of the seizure of power, to September 23, the revolutionary power installed in Saigon had not had time to consolidate its armed forces yet; however, the ardent patriotism of the masses, the

enthusiastic atmosphere created by the triumphant insurrection, had roused extraordinary combativeness in all. Armed with mere bamboo spears, the Nam Bo population rose up as one man to resist the enemy.

In Saigon where the enemy had occupied the main administrative buildings, the population immediately waged an armed and political struggle. In many quarters, French troops, helped by British and Japanese troops, ran into barricades; fierce fighting took place in streets and factories, during which the Vietnamese patriots' unequalled heroism more than made up for their lack of weapons. A general strike was decreed as well as non-cooperation with the French, who were encircled in the European quarters and isolated in a city deprived of light and water. The workers burnt down many French enterprises or took the machines to pieces and carried them to the countryside. The French could not extend their control beyond Saigon and were harassed every night by resolute partisans.

The French then sought to negotiate. On October 2nd, contacts took place. The Nam Bo Administrative Committee demanded recognition of Viet Nam's independence. The French refused and hostilities resumed after a week-long truce. Meanwhile, the first units of the French Expeditionary Corps landed and British General Gracey threatened to use force. The Nam Bo Committee sent him a note affirming that

"We respect the British-Indian troops engaged in discharging their task, but if they try to re-establish French sovereignty, they will face an entire people standing up to defend their independence."

On the Committee's order, the urban population began to evacuate the towns in order to prepare for the resistance. British-Indian troops were greeted with calm, but against the French, guerilla warfare was intensified and the blockade tightened around Saigon. However, with the arrival of their Expeditionary Corps the French acquired new strength. The British opened the way for them by occupying, step by step and in the name of the Allied Powers, the urban centres and localities outside Saigon. On October 21, Franco-British troops began their offensive against the Mekong delta, the country's rice granary, and the rubber plantations. Then they headed for the Tay Nguyen Highlands and landed troops in Southern Trung Bo; all this was done in November and December 1945. By the end of January 1946, with their armour and naval forces the French succeeded in controlling the main towns and communication lines in Nam Bo, Southern Trung Bo and the Tay Nguyen Highlands. Outgunned, the Vietnamese forces withdrew from the towns and began organizing the resistance in the countryside. Economic blockade and sabotage remained the main patriotic activities in the urban centres. The major resistance bases were located in the Plain of Reeds, the region of Thanh Phu (Ben Tre province) and that of U Minh (Western Nam Bo). The Vietnamese central government then considered that the essential task consisted in reinforcing to the utmost the resistance in the South.

In December, the leadership of the resistance was unified, and Nam Bo divided into three military zones.

The political, administrative and military apparatus of the resistance was reorganized on new bases. The French were compelled to scatter their forces and ran up against many difficulties in setting up councils of reactionary notables. They intensified terrorist operations against the population, carried out summary executions, and tortured patriots, but could not break the morale of the masses. On November 5, President Ho Chi Minh declared :

“The French colonialists should know that the Vietnamese people do not want bloodshed, that they love peace. But we are determined to sacrifice even millions of combatants and fight a protracted war of resistance lasting many years in order to safeguard Viet Nam's independence and preserve our children from slavery. We are sure that our war of resistance will be victorious!”

On November 25, the Communist Party's Central Committee formulated these instructions for the resistance :

“... Cut off communications between the towns occupied by the enemy, blockade them economically, encircle them politically and harass them militarily... wage all-out guerilla warfare, persuade the inhabitants of these towns to practise non-cooperation and those of the countryside to carry out the scorched-earth policy. Maintain liaison between the various military zones to ensure a unified command. The plans for both attack and retreat must be drawn up in detail...”

From the North, despite all economic and financial difficulties, reinforcements in men and supplies were kept up; many people volunteered to go and fight in the South; the population saved every cent for the defence of the South. On January 17, 1946, Vo Nguyen Giap declared on behalf of the armed forces:

"The preparation of a protracted resistance and the sending of reinforcements to the South constitute at present the number one concern of the government and the entire people. We must make every contribution and every sacrifice for the resistance, for the Southern front!"

The reorganization of the resistance soon bore fruit. French General Pellet admitted:

"The enemy is everywhere. No continuous front, no fixed lines of defence where our powerful and modern war means could be effectively used. Each cluster of bamboo, each hut perhaps, gives shelter to the enemy. How strained our soldiers' nerves are, for they face an elusive enemy in every place and at every moment!"

Following is the testimony of another Frenchman, a sailor of worker stock who, on being sent to Indochina, had thought that he was going to fight the Japanese:

"In Indochina, the French troops are acting as the German fascists did in France. I am sick of their behaviour. Why should our planes daily strafe unarmed fishermen? Why should our soldiers plunder,

burn, kill? Is it to civilize the country? Facing us is not a handful of rebels but a people determined to defend its freedom. Here everybody is a Viet Minh. In any event, one cannot exterminate an entire people."

The man who wrote this to his family in 1946 was Henri Martin.

Thus, in the first months of 1946, the situation was delicate both for the French and for the Vietnamese government. The French had occupied the main towns in Nam Bo and Southern Trung Bo, but were powerless in face of the guerillas; besides, so long as there was a revolutionary government installed in Hanoi the occupation of the South remained precarious. While continuing their military operations and the sending of reinforcements from France the colonialists began to draw up a plan for the secession of Cochinchina with an "autonomous government" made up of men of straw. On the Vietnamese side, while the will to defend independence remained unshakable and popular support fully ensured, the material and military forces available were insignificant; time was badly needed to build them up. Moreover, the presence in the North of Chiang Kai-shek troops backing the reactionary parties constituted a permanent threat.

The French colonialists then set about negotiating with Chiang Kai-shek, so that he would let French troops take over in North Indochina in exchange for the cancellation of France's extraterritorial rights in China, a section of the Yunnan railway, a "special zone" in Haiphong, and a special status for the Chinese residents in Indochina. An agreement was signed

on February 28, 1946, without the Vietnamese government, whose sovereignty was involved, being consulted. Four thousand French troops, who had taken refuge in China, then crossed back into Lai Chau while reinforcements from France were to land in the North.

In order not to have to fight both French and Chiang Kai-shek troops, the Vietnamese government preferred seeking a compromise with the former to end the occupation of the country by Chiang Kai-shek men. A compromise was necessary in order to gain time; it was possible because the French, while preparing for a total reconquest, were not yet ready to wage war throughout the country. They just wanted to introduce first a few troops into the North to gain a foothold there and then to extend the occupation with the arrival of reinforcements.

On March 6, 1946, President Ho Chi Minh and Sainteny, who represented the French government, signed an agreement with the following main clauses:

1. The French government recognizes the Republic of Viet Nam as a free state having its own government, parliament, army and finances, and as a member of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. As regards the reunion of the three "Ky" (*), the French government undertakes to abide by the decision taken by the population consulted by referendum.

2. The Vietnamese government declares itself ready to receive the French army in friendly fashion when,

* The three "Ky" were the three regions of the country: North, Centre and South.

in accordance with international agreements, it comes to relieve the Chinese troops.

3. Immediately after the exchange of signatures, each contracting party will take all necessary measures to end the hostilities, maintain its troops on their respective positions, and create an atmosphere conducive to the speedy opening of friendly and frank negotiations. These will deal with the diplomatic relations of Viet Nam with foreign countries, the future status of Indochina, and French economic and cultural interests in Viet Nam.

After the signing of the March 6 agreement a complex struggle — military, political and diplomatic — began with a view to implementing it. 15,000 French soldiers entered Hanoi, but on the other hand, the 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek troops withdrew from the country, taking with them the adventurers of the Viet Quoc and the Viet Cach. From now on the struggle was to be concentrated against the French colonialists' military and political schemes.

In Nam Bo, the French kept up their mopping-up raids and bombardments and their repression against the Vietnamese patriots. Barely a few weeks after the signing of the agreement, French High Commissioner Thierry d'Argenlieu rigged up, with the help of some stooges, the "government of the Nam Ky Autonomous Republic" in order to perpetually separate Nam Bo from the rest of the country. On his arrival in Hanoi, General Leclerc provokingly declared that "Hanoi is the last stage of the liberation". As soon as they arrived in the North, the French troops

committed countless provocations, murdered Vietnamese patriots and encroached upon Viet Nam's sovereignty. The French colonialists and the Paris reactionary leaders firmly believed that the military reconquest of Indochina would be a walk-over and that the Vietnamese people would have no way to resist French military power.

In those conditions the negotiations between the French and Vietnamese authorities could only be a long-drawn-out battle which would lead nowhere. The preliminary parleys in Da Lat, beginning in April and lasting until May, could only record the fundamental differences in the positions of the two parties. The Vietnamese party defended national sovereignty both internal and external, the unity of the country from North to South, while the French put forward a project of an "Indochinese Federation" with a French governor at its head, and claimed to represent Viet Nam in all her international relations. The French also wanted to include Viet Nam in the franc zone. This amounted to giving a new name to the old colonial structure. The main conflict was about the status of Nam Bo, which the French wanted to sever from the rest of the country. For its part, the Vietnamese delegation stood pat on the principle of Viet Nam's unity. Vo Nguyen Giap, head of the Vietnamese delegation, declared:

"If ever Nam Bo is separated from the rest of the country, the Vietnamese people will devote all their energies to struggling for its return to a unified Viet Nam."

President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed :

"Our brothers in Nam Bo are citizens of Viet Nam. Rivers may dry up, mountains may erode, but this truth will remain for ever."

On July 6, 1946, negotiations opened in Fontainebleau, near Paris. The French were adamant. The conference was deadlocked. On August 18, Marius Moutet declared that "Cochinchina was a French colony." While France's representatives negotiated in Fontainebleau, the French High Commissioner in Indochina held a conference of puppets in Dalat on August 1 to rig up an Indochinese Federation. In Viet Nam, French troops multiplied their provocations. The Fontainebleau conference had therefore no reason to continue. President Ho Chi Minh, who was then in France made a last effort at reconciliation by signing with Marius Moutet a *modus vivendi*. However, French reinforcements kept coming. The French government actively prepared for a war of reconquest.

In October, the Vietnamese National Assembly entrusted President Ho Chi Minh with the task of forming a new government on a broad national union basis. At the same session, the Assembly adopted the Constitution, which affirmed as its fundamental principle that "all power belongs to the people", and proclaimed the people's democratic rights, and equality between man and woman and among all ethnic groups. The Constitution declared that Viet Nam is a unified country from North to South.

However, French troops continued their provocations ; the colonialists' manoeuvres became so cynical

that their placeman, Nguyen Van Thinh, president of the Cochinchinese "autonomous government" was driven to suicide. French troops sought to create incidents everywhere in order to violate Viet Nam's sovereignty. In Haiphong, the only port through which the North communicated with the outside world and whose customs duties supplied an important part of the revenue of the Vietnamese budget, the French wanted to establish their own customs service; on November 20, French troops opened fire at Vietnamese forces in Haiphong and Lang Son. In Haiphong, French warships also shelled populous quarters. The French attacks caused several thousand victims there. By occupying Haiphong and Lang Son, the two points of entry to the North, the French command revealed its intentions. While getting the people prepared for more French attacks, the Vietnamese government made an ultimate effort for peace, but the few agreements concluded were quickly sabotaged by the French.

French provocations now took place right in Viet Nam's capital. On December 17, a French assault on Vermicelli Street in Hanoi killed about one hundred people. On December 18, the French occupied the Ministry of Finance and that of Communications and multiplied their provocations in the streets. The population and the self-defence militia erected barricades, made openings in walls for house-to-house communication and prepared for French attacks. President Ho Chi Minh sent a message to Leon Blum, the newly-appointed French Premier, asking him to get the signed agreements implemented. No answer

came. On December 19, the French command sent the Vietnamese government an ultimatum demanding the dismantling of the barricades, the disarming of the self-defence militia, and the handing over to the French troops of the maintenance of "order" in the Vietnamese capital.

On the evening of December 19, President Ho Chi Minh issued an appeal to the nation :

"Compatriots all over the country,

As we desired peace, we made concessions. But the more concessions we made, the further the French colonialists went, because they are resolved to invade our country once again.

No! We would rather sacrifice all than lose our country and be enslaved. Men and women, old and young, regardless of religious creed, political affiliation and nationality, all the Vietnamese must stand up to fight the French colonialists to save the Fatherland. Those who have rifles will use their rifles, those who have swords will use their swords; those who have no swords will use spades, hoes or sticks. Everyone must endeavour to oppose the colonialists and save the country. The hour for national salvation has struck. We must sacrifice even our last drop of blood to safeguard our country. Even if we have to endure the hardest privations and greatest sufferings we are ready to make every sacrifice. Victory will surely be ours."

The war of resistance, so far limited to the South, now spread to the whole country. The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, hardly born, had to undergo a

decisive trial: war against a strongly-armed imperialist power by far superior to her technically and economically. However, the young republic came out the winner after a long resistance marked in 1954 by the resounding victory of Dien Bien Phu.

National independence was definitively regained. This did not come about by chance, but was the result of a protracted national and popular struggle. The Vietnamese Communist Party, now the Viet Nam Workers' Party, heir to a millenary tradition, continuing a fight begun by various patriotic movements, right at the start of the colonial conquest, bearer of new ideas and practising new methods of action, had caused this struggle to make a leap forward and led it to victory.

This national independence, built on a broad popular basis, with well-defined prospects, and defended by large popular masses under the direction of a strong and experienced Party with a mastery of revolutionary science, will victoriously resist all assaults.

APPENDIX

THE LITERARY MOVEMENT FROM 1930 TO 1945

The far-reaching changes in Vietnamese society, chiefly after the First World War, and the seething political atmosphere from 1930 to 1945, exercised a great influence on Vietnamese literature. A modern literature was born, which had completely broken free from the traditional genres. Written by new men of letters different from the scholars of old, it answered the requirements of a new public.

The mandarin examinations were abolished in 1918 (1915 in Tonkin). *Quoc ngu*, an adaptation of the Latin alphabet, definitively replaced the old ideograms. The new intelligentsia no longer knew anything about Chinese classics but came under the influence of European authors, French ones in particular. The new printing techniques made possible a larger diffusion of literary works than had been possible with xylography. Newspapers and periodicals gave rise to new literary genres. New forces and new aspirations sought expression in new forms. The taste of the reading public also changed. The scholars of old wrote either for a minority of connoisseurs or for the peasant communities. The new writers were to write for the townsfolk — students, civil servants, employees and intellectuals.

Traditional literature, predominantly poetical, was shaped by strict rules. Thought was expressed in a suggestive way which often evaded a clear articulation of ideas. The new authors freed themselves from those rules and habits. The break was a tumultuous one in poetry. In the 30's, heated polemics took place between advocates of old and new poetry. Naturally, the old school was worsted, but Vietnamese poetry could not be described as having completely cast off all rules. The rules only became more flexible, the rhymes and rhythms, the tones, could combine more freely to depict more intimate and personal thoughts and feelings.

Prose conquered pride of place and reflected the various aspects of society in its evolution. New literary genres: novels, short stories, press reports, modern dramas, made their appearance. Essays in history, philosophy, morals, were now written in the vernacular instead of literary Chinese. Prose lost its rhythmical character and the perfect symmetry of clauses, and there was a more logical expression of thought. All these modifications, which began to appear in the twenties, definitely prevailed after 1930. While the authors of the twenties were still influenced by traditional culture, the next generation was essentially modern in outlook. But on all of them political events exercised considerable influence.

To many writers sprung from the petty bourgeoisie, the failure suffered by the Quoc Zan Dang in the Yen Bai insurrection, the economic crisis, and the bloody repression by the colonial administration shattered all

hopes for a renewal. They fell into a pessimistic romanticism, born directly of the revolt of the petty bourgeoisie against the colonial regime and the outmoded feudal structures — a powerless revolt, pitilessly crushed. At the beginning, this literature found choice materials in the claims of the individual against the rules of feudal life. Aspirations to free love, protests against forced marriage, and the dream of a free life inspired beautiful pages, poems showing a certain power and novels with vivid episodes. But these dreams of liberty and change soon collapsed in face of colonial and feudal realities. Within a few years, romanticism turned bleak, poems and novels were shrouded in a veil of sadness “coming from the depth of the centuries.” The weight of Japanese occupation, added to the colonial regime, blocked all prospects of liberation and turned the romantic school to mysticism and hermeticism.

After 1930, a Pleiad of romantic poets, among them The Lu, Luu Trong Lu, Xuan Dieu, Huy Thong, was warmly welcomed by the young generation. The “self” prevailed in the new poetry. Novels and short stories, by Khai Hung and Nhat Linh in particular, dealt essentially with family tragedies in which the young generation clashed with the old. The feudal family was subjected to bitter criticism. Love became the central theme of these works — love frustrated by old social taboos, forced to struggle to earn recognition but often defeated.

After a short-lived blossoming, the romantic school died out, giving way to more vigorous trends. The

economic crisis set the popular masses in motion and proletarianized many intellectuals. The founding of the Communist Party introduced new ferment into cultural and ideological life. Its militants discussed in the press problems of art and literature — art for art's sake? or art for life's sake? — which the people followed with great interest. The activities of the Party, the participation of writers in the great national democratic movement of 1936-1939 oriented the authors towards social realities. A realist tendency gradually threw the romantic one into the shade. Novels by Ngo Tat To, Vu Trong Phung, Nguyen Cong Hoan, Nguyen Hong, Nam Cao, etc., bitterly depicted the peasants' misery and struggles, and their oppression by mandarins and notables. The struggles of the working class and the under-privileged in the towns were the subject of many a novel. In his satirical poems, the poet Tu Mo castigated the powers that be.

However, stringent censorship considerably limited the sphere of activities of realist writers. They could criticize the mandarin regime but not colonial domination. So, parallel to this legal literature, there was a clandestine literature written most of the time by revolutionary militants. Anonymous works were circulated. We have already mentioned the blossoming of songs and poems during the Nghe Tinh Soviets insurrection. The revolutionaries imprisoned after 1930 composed many poems in which they sang the love for the fatherland, revolutionary heroism and faith in final victory. This optimism had an impact on literature as a whole.

In 1938, a young communist poet, born in 1920, gaoled from 1939 to 1942 when he escaped, published a collection of poems : *Từ ấy* (Ever Since That Day), famous for these two verses which were soon engraved in the minds of the youth :

*Ever since that day, Summer has shone in me,
And the Sun of Truth has illumined my heart.*

Thus, revolutionary romanticism came into being. Patriotic and revolutionary themes prevailed in clandestine literature and in writings published in the liberated zones during the Japanese occupation while the kind of literature authorized by the French and the Japanese sank into hermeticism.

An important event gave a new impulse to the revolutionary trend. In 1943, the Communist Party published its theses on cultural problems, advocating a national, popular and scientific culture. In 1944, leading writers and cultural workers founded the Cultural Association for National Salvation, which joined the Viet Minh front. A new chapter began for Vietnamese literature, which was to enter the revolutionary path, closely bound to the national and popular struggle.

Special mention should be made of a work by President Ho Chi Minh, written in 1942-1943 when he was jailed in South China by Chiang Kai-shek agents. It was a collection of poems in literary Chinese, burning with inexhaustible revolutionary optimism, and sparkling with unparalleled humour and feeling.

It must also be added that political writings by Ho Chi Minh and by Party and DRVN Government leaders are remarkable examples of new Vietnamese prose.

NOTES

Foreign readers can read some Vietnamese works which have been translated into French, English and Russian, particularly :

Ho Chi Minh : *Prison Diary*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi.

To Huu : *Collection of Poems*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi.

Ngo Tat To, *When the Light Is Out*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi.

Nguyen Cong Hoan, *Impasse*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi.

Europe : Numéro spécial sur la littérature vietnamienne—juillet 1961.

Anthologie de la poésie vietnamienne, Editeurs Français Réunis, Paris 1969.

24th Year of the Reign of Tu Duc (1871)

**A CIRCULAR LETTER SENT OUT
BY NGHE TINH PATRIOTS**

The following is a text of the Scholars' Movement. Note :

— The regional character of the appeal (there was no national leadership) ;

— National pride, the evocation of an age-old fatherland, the resolve to fight ;

— Attacks on Catholics, the scholars being unable to define a policy of broad national union ;

— The programme of restoration of an enlightened monarchy.

*O*UR scholars, our people, standing under the Southern heavens, look towards the North Star. (1)

For many decades, like a beneficent rain, the favours of Nghieu have been bestowed on us ; (2)

Under four reigns, we have not been subjected to the fire and water of Kiet. (3)

Thanks to education by Emperor Thanh To, we have rejected the evil doctrine of the West ; (4)

In the land of Viet Nam, civilization is more resplendent than ever and the State displays its legitimate continuity.

The Imperial Gate of the Ha and the Court of the Thuong, the founders of the Empire in the eyes of all, still fill everyone with gratitude :

Those of Phan Zuong as well as of Ha Phon, in their hearts of hearts, continue to harbour boundless loyalty.

The people remain attached to the Nguyen dynasty and ignore the men of the West ;

The latter, with their barbarian customs, have shown their dog-and-pig-like faces.

Once already they had dared to display their ratlike visages at our gates, bent on carrying out their perfidious intentions : (5)

Now, they have bared their fangs and are exhibiting their arrogance right in our palaces.

From within and without, they keep nibbling at our country, like silkworms at mulberry leaves .

Churches and conversions : there's the danger, the ground is giving way under our feet.

Alas, that's the state of affairs, do you know it ?

Those who benefited from the Emperor's favours now deceive him :

Those responsible for the destiny of the Fatherland now plan a sell-out.

With the face of a Tu Dao and the heart of a Tan Coi(6), they form a chain of traitors and shrink from no deceptions to carry through their treason.

They hide the truth to the Emperor, whose lucidity cannot see through the ruses of a Hoan Dau (7), and, renewing Truong Luong's pretence, simulate loyal ardour.

The true doctrine is in the books of our Saints and Sages: "to attack evil doctrines" — this teaching remains inscribed in our universe; "to forbid all heresies" — this strict rule has existed since time immemorial.

To know and to act are but one thing: why should one divorce one's services to the country from one's own destiny?

Like Thuong Son and Thi Trung, we must live in worthy fashion and shed our blood for the Empire;

The flesh of Van Dat and the bones of Cao Zong (8), after their deaths, can proudly face our mountains and rivers.

Like heroes, we shall advance with burning hearts;

We seek no honours, but only to do our duty.

We shall not drift with the stream, we shall not let the wind blow without trying to stop it; once Western ships are driven away, the Perfume River shall again be at peace (9).

Let rich people donate their wealth, let robust people lend the strength of their arms, and we shall exterminate the Western barbarians; we shall be soldiers when military operations call for it; between two operations, we shall put aside our coats of mail and again be ordinary people; we shall not blame Heaven for our trials; everywhere our people and our scholars are the same: all of us are

enduring hardships for the sake of our native land and we shall reinstate our Fatherland in its former boundaries.

In this Southern land, the right doctrine shall be restored and its limpid stream shall sparkle under the autumn moon ;

The imperial power of the Nguyen shall stand as firm as Mount Thai.

This call to arms is addressed to all men of good will.

A poem follows :

*Ever since that day when in their citadels,
Our leaders, deceived by the enemy, implored
peace,
War has been discussed throughout the land :
Here are three dignitaries who try to sell out the
country!
And there's that general, who treats with the
enemy!
For centuries, Vo Muc swallowed his anger,
And for milleniums, Zi Ngo quivered with rage. (10)
Scholars and commoners, unite your efforts,
Let fidelity and loyalty be engraved in your
hearts.*

This circular letter is addressed to all fellow doctors, licentiates, bachelors and scholars of Hanoi, Bac Ninh, and Son Tay provinces.

NOTES

(1) The Southern heavens: Viet Nam's location was stated in relation to China.

The North Star: The Emperor.

(2) Nghieu: a mythical Chinese emperor, renowned for his virtues.

(3) Kiet: a notoriously cruel Chinese emperor.

(4) Catholicism.

(5) An allusion to the French attacks on Tourane, then on Hanoi.

(6) Tan Coi: a defeatist official in Chinese history.

(7) Hoan Dau, Truong Luong: personages of Chinese history.

(8) Names of patriots.

(9) River crossing Hue, the capital city.

(10) Two generals of ancient Chinese history who opposed treason by the Court.

Note the abundant allusions to Chinese history, as usually happens in the scholars' writings. With the exception of Van Dat and Cao Zong, two Vietnamese patriots killed in the struggle against the French conquerors, all other proper names were taken from Chinese history.

**POLITICAL THESES
OF THE INDOCHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY
(OCTOBER 1930)**

(Excerpts)

This important historic document of the Indochinese Communist Party was drafted by Tran Phu and approved at the First Meeting of the Party's Central Committee (October 1930). The Theses applied the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of our country. It analyzed the characteristics and laid down the tasks of the revolution, and defined its main motive forces. It charted the Party's general line in the national democratic revolution.

We publish below the first six points :

I

**THE WORLD SITUATION AND THE
INDOCHINESE REVOLUTION**

1. Since the end of the imperialist war (1914-1918), the world situation may be viewed as having gone through three periods :

a) During the first period (1918-1923), as a result of the war, the capitalist economy suffered depression and crisis, and in many places in Europe the proletariat rose up and fought for power. Eventually, on

the one hand, the Russian proletariat defeated the imperialists who attacked the country from the outside and the counter-revolutionaries who carried out sabotage inside, and set up a firm dictatorship of the proletariat; on the other hand, however, the West European proletariat met with failure (for instance the German proletariat in 1923).

b) During the second period (1923-1928), availing themselves of the recent setbacks suffered by the European proletariat, the various imperialisms acted on the offensive, exploited the proletariat and the colonial peoples to the utmost, and brought temporary stability to the imperialist economy. On account of its previous failure, the proletariat in the imperialist countries acted only on the defensive. The revolution broke out in the colonial countries. Economic consolidation in the Soviet Union helped Communist influence spread all over the world.

c) The third period, the present one, presents the following characteristics: Capitalism has not been able to maintain its temporary stability and has slid back into crisis; the various imperialisms again have to engage in a sharp competition for markets, making a new imperialist war inevitable.

The Soviet economy has surpassed the pre-imperialist war level; successful socialist construction has exasperated the various imperialisms, which seek to overthrow the Soviet Union, the citadel of world revolution.

In the imperialist countries, the proletariat has put up a fierce struggle (large-scale strikes in Germany,

France, Poland, etc.); the colonies (especially China and India) are in a revolutionary effervescence. This is due to increasingly harsh exploitation of the masses by capitalism, which is undergoing a crisis; in the world the number of unemployed totals scores of millions and the workers and peasants suffer untold misery. In this third period, proletarian revolution and colonial revolution have reached a very high level; in some places the revolutionaries are ready to seize power.

At present, Indochina has contributed its revolutionary forces to the seething struggle going on in the world, thus broadening the worker-peasant front against imperialism. On the other hand, the intense revolutionary movement in the world (especially in China and India) exerts a strong influence on the struggle in Indochina and gives it an even more vigorous impetus. And so the world revolution and the Indochinese revolution are closely connected.

II

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA

2. Indochina (Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos) is a colony of French imperialism. So, its economy is dependent upon that of French imperialism. The following are the two outstanding features of the development of Indochina:

a) Indochina must develop independently, but it cannot do so because of its colonial status.

b) Class contradiction has grown ever fiercer between the workers, peasants and other toiling people on the one hand, and the feudal land-owners, capitalists and imperialists on the other.

3. Economic contradictions :

a) Though the bulk of agricultural products is exported by the imperialists, the economy has remained feudal in character. Most plantations (rubber, cotton, coffee, etc.) belong to French capitalists. The greater part of the land is owned by native landlords, who exploit it in the feudal way, i.e. rent it in small plots to poor tenants for a very high rent. Rice yields are, besides, lower in Indochina than in other countries (per hectare paddy output in Malaya: 2,150 kilograms; in Siam, 1,870 kilograms; in Europe, 4,570 kilograms; in Indochina, only 1,210 kilograms) More rice is exported every year, but this is not due to the development of rice-growing, only to increased plundering of the people's rice by the capitalists.

b) The oppressive regime imposed by French imperialism hampers the development of productive forces in Indochina. The imperialists have not built any heavy industries (like iron works, machine building, etc.) for this would harm the monopoly of French industry. They only develop those industries which serve their administration and trade, for instance railway lines, small shipyards, etc.

The aim of French imperialism is to make Indochina an economic dependency of France, and so it promotes only those industries which it finds more profitable to develop in Indochina than in France

itself. Raw materials exploitation is meant not to help Indochina's economy develop independently, but to prevent French industry's dependence on other imperialisms.

c) As exportation is in the hands of French capitalists, internal trade and production is dependent upon the export requirements of the French imperialists. The more exports increase, the more the country is drained of its natural resources by imperialism. Another special feature: French banks (*Banque de l'Indochine, Crédit foncier, etc*) collect capital from the native people to aid French exporters.

In short: Indochina's economy remains an agricultural one, with predominantly feudal features. All this interferes with its independent development.

4. Class contradictions:

French imperialism, in alliance with native landlords, traders and usurers, ruthlessly exploits the peasants. It rakes up the country's farm produce for export, imports French goods for sale within the country, imposes high taxation, drives the peasantry to misery and craftsmen to unemployment.

Land is more and more concentrated in the hands of the imperialists and landlords; the existence of numerous intermediaries cause the rent that has to be paid by poor tenants to be all the higher. The latter have to pay such high interest rates to usurers that they are often compelled to give them their lands or even their children in payment of their debts.

The imperialists pay no attention to keeping the dykes in good repair for protection against floods. Irrigation facilities are in the hands of the capitalists, who exact a high price for their use: no money, no water. And so more and more crop failures occur because of flood and drought. Not only are the peasants prevented from developing their economy, but they also grow increasingly dependent upon the capitalists and fare worse and worse: unemployment and starvation afflict more and more people.

The old economy is falling to pieces very fast, yet the new industry is developing at a very slow rate; factories, workshops etc., cannot hire all the poor and unemployed and many starve in the countryside where the situation is truly tragic.

In the factories, plantations and mines, the capitalists cruelly exploit and oppress the workers. Their wages, which are at starvation level, are cut by all kinds of fines. They work eleven, twelve hours a day on an average. Abuse and blows are rained on them. When they fall sick, far from getting any medical attention, they are dismissed. There is no social insurance. In plantations and mines, the owners pen their workers up in camps and forbid them to wander out. They use a system of contracts to recruit labourers and move them to places where they can impose their own law on the workers and even inflict penalties on them. Due to such harsh working conditions, large numbers of workers in Indochina suffer from serious diseases (tuberculosis, trachoma, malaria, etc.) and more of them die at a very young age.

The Indochinese proletariat is not yet numerous, but the number of workers, especially plantation workers, is on the increase. They fight ever more vigorously. The peasants have also awakened and fiercely oppose the imperialists and feudalists. Strikes in 1928, 1929 and the violent outbursts of struggle by workers and peasants this year (1930) clearly prove that class struggle in Indochina is gaining momentum. The most outstanding and most important feature in the revolutionary movement in Indochina is that the struggle of the worker-peasant masses has taken on a very clearly independent character and is no longer influenced by nationalism as it used to be.

III

CHARACTERISTICS AND TASK OF THE INDOCHINESE REVOLUTION

5. The above-mentioned contradictions account for the fact that the revolutionary movement in Indochina is growing day by day. In its initial period, the Indochinese revolution will be a bourgeois democratic revolution, for it cannot yet directly tackle the organizational problems of socialism ; the country is still very weak economically, many feudal vestiges still linger on, the relation of class forces is not yet tipped in favour of the proletariat ; besides, imperialism still holds oppressive sway. For these reasons, in the present period, the revolution will only have an agrarian and anti-imperialist character.

The bourgeois democratic revolution is a preparatory period leading to socialist revolution. Once it has won victory, and a worker-peasant government has been established, industry within the country will develop, proletarian organizations will be reinforced, the leadership of the proletariat will be consolidated, and the relation of class forces will be altered to the advantage of the proletariat. Then the struggle will develop both in depth and in breadth and the bourgeois democratic revolution will advance towards the proletarian revolution. The present period is one of proletarian revolution in the world and socialist building in the Soviet Union ; thanks to help from the proletariat exercising dictatorship in various countries, Indochina will bypass the capitalist stage and advance direct to socialism.

In the bourgeois democratic revolution, the proletariat and the peasantry are the two main motive forces, but only if leadership is in the hands of the proletariat can the revolution triumph.

6. The essential aim of the bourgeois democratic revolution is on the one hand to do away with the feudal vestiges and the mode of pre-capitalist exploitation and to carry out a thorough agrarian revolution ; on the other hand, to overthrow French imperialism and achieve complete independence for Indochina. The two faces of the struggle are closely connected, for only by toppling imperialism can we eliminate the landlord class and carry out a successful agrarian revolution ; conversely, only by abolishing the feudal regime can we knock down imperialism.

In order to reach these essential goals, we must set up worker-peasant Soviet power. Worker-peasant Soviet power alone is the very powerful instrument which will make it possible to overthrow imperialism, feudalism and landlordism, give land to the tillers, and legal protection to the interests of the proletariat.

The essential tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution are the following :

1 — To overthrow French imperialism, feudalism, and landlordism.

2 — To set up a worker-peasant government.

3 — To confiscate all lands belonging to foreign and native landlords and to religious organizations, and hand them over to middle and poor peasants, the right of ownership of the land being in the hands of the worker-peasant government.

4 — To nationalize all big undertakings of the foreign capitalists.

5 — To abolish all current taxes and corvées and institute a progressive tax.

6 — To decree an 8-hour workday and improve the living standards of the workers and toiling people.

7 — Indochina to be completely independent ; national self-determination to be recognized.

8 — To organize a worker-peasant army.

9 — Equality between man and woman.

10 — Support to the Soviet Union : alliance with the world proletariat and with the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semi-colonies.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

On August 30, 1945, President Ho Chi Minh arrived in Hanoi, coming from the Free Zone. On September 2, 1945, before 500,000 people gathered in Ba Dinh square, he read the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

“All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live and to be happy and free.

The Declaration, made in 1791 at the time of the French Revolution, on the Rights of Man and the Citizen, also states: “All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights.”

Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Centre and the South of Viet Nam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united.

They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots; they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood. They have fettered public opinion; they have practised obscurantism against our people. To weaken our race they have forced us to use opium and alcohol.

In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the bone, impoverished our people and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our ricefields, our mines, our forests, our raw materials. They have monopolized the issue of bank-notes and the export trade.

They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes, and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.

They have hampered our national bourgeoisie from prospering; they have mercilessly exploited our workers.

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists violated Indochina's territory to establish new bases against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them.

Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri province to the North of Viet Nam, more than two million of our fellow-citizens died from starvation. On the 9th of March, French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered, showing that not only were they incapable of "protecting" us, but that, in the span of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

On several occasions before the 9th of March, the Viet Minh league had urged the French to join forces with it against the Japanese. Instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists so intensified their terrorist activities against the Viet Minh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.

Notwithstanding all this, our fellow-citizens have always manifested a tolerant and humane attitude towards the French. Even after the Japanese coup de force of March 1945, the Viet Minh League helped many Frenchmen to cross the frontier, rescued some of them from Japanese jails and protected French lives and property.

From the autumn of 1940, our country had in fact ceased to be a French colony and had become a Japanese possession.

After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose up to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French.

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated. Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered us, and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for tens of centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic.

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France; we repeal all the international obligations that France has so far subscribed to on behalf of Viet Nam and we abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland.

The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer our country.

We are convinced that the Allied nations, which at Teheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the

principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to recognize the independence of Viet Nam.

A people that has courageously opposed French domination for more than eighty years, a people that has fought side by side with the Allies against the fascists during these last years, such a people must be free and independent.

For those reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet Nam has the right to be free and independent, and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence.

Hanoi, the Second of September 1945

HO CHI MINH, *President*

TRAN HUY LIEU	VO NGUYEN GIAP
CHU VAN TAN	PHAM VAN DONG
DUONG DUC HIEN	NGUYEN VAN TO
NGUYEN MANH HA	CU HUY CAN
PHAM NGOC THACH	NGUYEN VAN XUAN
VU TRONG KHANH	DAO TRONG KIM
VU DINH HOE	LE VAN HIEN

CHRONOLOGY

April 15, 1847

Five armoured junks of a Vietnamese flotilla sunk by French war vessels in Da Nang.

August 31, 1858

Attack on Da Nang by a French squadron.

Early 1859

First French attacks against South Viet Nam (Cochinchina).

February 1859

Occupation of Gia Dinh by the French.

June 5, 1862

Phan Thanh Gian, representative of the Court of Hue, negotiated with Admiral Bonard a treaty according to which the Court ceded to France the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina (Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa and Dinh Tuong), and agreed to pay 20 million francs' damages and to open three ports of Central Viet Nam (Annam) to French trade.

From 1860 to 1864

Uprisings led by Truong Dinh, Do Trinh Thoai, Phan Van Dat, Ho Huan Nghiep, Nguyen Thong, Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Nguyen Qui Binh, Trinh Quang

Nghi, Luu Tan Thien, Le Quang Quyen, Thien Ho Duong (resistance bases in Gia Dinh, Cho Lon, Can Giuoc, Tan An, Go Cong, Dinh Tuong, and Dong Thap Muoi or Plain of Reeds).

August 20, 1864

Wounded in an engagement, Truong Dinh committed suicide so as not to fall into enemy hands. His son Truong Quyen carried on the resistance. Cambodian patriots led by Bonze Pokumpo joined the Vietnamese insurgents in resisting French conquest.

July 1867

The French colonialists invaded the three western provinces of Cochinchina (Vinh Long, An Giang and Ha Tien).

June 16, 1868

Nguyen Trung Truc seized Kien Giang post (Rach Gia province).

November 19, 1873

Occupation of Hanoi by the French. Other localities of North Viet Nam (Tonkin) delta such as Nam Dinh, Hai Zhuong... fell into the hands of the French.

December 21, 1873

Francis Garnier killed in an ambush at the gates of Hanoi.

March 15, 1874

Franco-Vietnamese treaty: the French retroceded the conquered towns but obtained the right of setting up a garrison in Hanoi and in Haiphong, and the opening of the Red River to trade.

1874

Uprisings led by Tran Tan and Dang Nhu Mai in Nghe An province.

April 25, 1882

Henri Rivière seized Hanoi; Hoang Zieu, the governor, committed suicide.

August 25, 1883

Harmand Treaty: Viet Nam became a French protectorate.

1883

- Uprising led by Dinh Van Chat in Nghe An.
- Henri Rivière killed near Hanoi at the same place where Francis Garnier had died.

June 6, 1884

Patenôtre treaty: French domination was definitively established over Viet Nam, which was to be divided into three Ky (Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina) with different administrative regimes.

1884

Uprisings led by Duong Khai in Bac Ninh, by Nguyen Quang Bich in the highlands of Tonkin, by Nguyen Cao in the mountain regions of Bac Giang province.

June 1885

General De Courcy landed in Huê to demand the disbandment of the Vietnamese troops.

July 4, 1885

Attack on French positions in Huê by troops of regent Ton That Thuyet and mandarin Tran Xuan Soan. French troops plundered the capital city.

1885

Uprising led by Nguyen Thien Thuat, who built his resistance base in Bai Say, Hung Yen province (1885-1889).

— Insurrections led by scholar Phan Dinh Phung and his chief lieutenant Cao Thang in Huong Khe region (Ha Tinh). Their field of action covered the provinces of Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Nghe An and Thanh Hoa.

— Uprisings led by Nguyen Hanh, Nguyen Xuan On, Le Doan Nha, Nguyen Huu Chinh in Nghe An; by Truong Dinh Hoi and Nguyen Tu Nhu in Quang Tri; by Dang Huu Pho in Thua Thien; by Le Trung Dinh in Quang Ngai.

1886

Uprising led by Pham Banh and Dinh Cong Trang in Thanh Hoa. A resistance fortress was built in Ba Dinh.

— Uprising led by scholar Tong Duy Tan in Hung Linh region (Thanh Hoa) in alliance with the *Muong*; it was to last till 1892.

— Insurrections led by Nguyen Phuong in Thanh Hoa; by Ta Quang Hien in Thai Binh; by Le Truc and Nguyen Pham Tran in Quang Binh; by Hoang Van Phuc in Quang Tri; by Nguyen Ba Loan in Quang Ngai; by Tran Van Du, Nguyen Duy Hieu and Nguyen Ham in Quang Nam; by Mai Xuan Thuong in Binh Dinh.

1887

Insurrection led by Hoang Hoa Tham in Yen The (Bac Giang province). The guerilla movement was to last for 25 years, till 1913, when its leader was murdered by a traitor.

November 1, 1888

King Ham Nghi was captured by the French and exiled to Algeria.

From 1889 to 1893

Insurrections led by De Kieu and Doc Ngu in the valley of the Da river.

May 1904

Phan Boi Chau gathered the partisans of the *Can Vuong* movement to found a new organization, the *Zuy Tan* (Renovation).

1905

The victory of Japan over Tsarist Russia resounded like a crash of thunder all over Asia.

1905 - 1908

Dong Zu (Go East) movement.

August 15, 1906

Phan Chu Trinh sent the Governor-General of Indochina a letter demanding reforms of the colonial administration, and advocated the abolition of the monarchy and the mandarin system, and the adoption of republican institutions.

March 1907

The *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* (Tonkin Institute of Studies) was founded in Hanoi by a number of scholars, among them Luong Van Can, Nguyen Quyen...

February 1908

The slogan "Pay no more taxes to the French" was launched.

1909

In exchange for financial advantages, capitalist Japan recognized the French conquests in Asia and expelled the Vietnamese patriots.

— Phan Chu Trinh was arrested by the colonialists.

1909-1910

Uprising of the *Muong* in Hoa Binh led by Doc Bang and Tong Kiem.

1911-1912

Uprising of the *Meo* in Ha Giang led by Chioung Nui Tchang.

From 1900 to 1910

— Many insurrections of ethnic groups in Tay Nguyen (Highlands of Annam): Sedang, Hre, Bahnar, Jarai... against French colonialist oppression.

— Setting up of secret associations in Cochinchina.

February 1912

Phan Boi Chau founded the *Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi* (Association for the Restoration of Viet Nam) the program of which was to overthrow the colonial regime and set up a Republic of Viet Nam. The association was to be dissolved in 1914.

January 1915

Unsuccessful attacks by armed patriots of the Phu Tho garrison and other posts in Ninh Binh and Mong Cai.

May 3, 1916

King Duy Tan's abortive insurrection, inspired by Thai Phien and Tran Cao Van.

1918-1921

Armed uprisings of the *Nung*, *Man* and *Meo* in the mountain regions of Tonkin.

December 1920

At the Tours Congress (France) Nguyen Ai Quoc (who later took the name of Ho Chi Minh) advocated adherence to the Third International and founding of the French Communist Party.

1924

Pham Hong Thai (a member of the *Tam Tam Xa*) made an attempt on the life of French Governor General Merlin in Canton.

1924-1925

Big workers' strikes in Cholon, Nam Dinh, Hai Zuong and Hanoi.

June 1925

The *Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi* (Viet Nam Revolutionary Youth Association) was founded by Nguyen Ai Quoc in Canton.

Another party of Marxist tendency, the *Tan Viet* (New Viet Nam) was founded in the country.

— Phan Boi Chau was arrested in China and taken back to Viet Nam.

August 1925

A strike was staged in the Saigon arsenal to delay the departure of two French war vessels for China.

1925 - 1926

Three important movements were launched to demand the release of Phan Boi Chau then of Nguyen An Ninh. A nation-wide demonstration was staged on the occasion of Phan Chu Trinh's funeral.

December 25, 1927

The *Viet Nam Quoc Zan Dang* (Viet Nam Nationalist Party) was founded with Nguyen Thai Hoc as leader.

1927-1929

Strikes in Haiphong, Nam Dinh, Saigon, and the rubber plantations.

1929

— The first communist cell was set up in Hanoi in March.

— Dissolution of the *Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi* and founding of the *Dong Zuong Cong San Dang* (Indochinese Communist Party) in Tonkin, the *Annam Cong San Dang* (Communist Party of Annam) in Annam, and the *Dong Zuong Cong San Lien Doan* (Indochinese Communist Federation) in Cochinchina.

February 3, 1930

Conference of delegates of the three Vietnamese Communist parties, held in Kowloon and presided over by Nguyen Ai Quoc: unification of the communist movement and founding of the *Dang Cong San Viet Nam* (Viet Nam Communist Party).

October 1930

The First Plenum of the Viet Nam Communist Party Central Committee adopted the name of *Dang Cong San Dong Zuong* (Indochinese Communist Party) and the political theses presented by its Secretary-General Tran Phu.

1930 - 1931 :

Nation-wide strikes were staged (in rubber plantations, the Haiphong cement plant, Nam Dinh weaving mill, Vinh and Zi An railway depots, Saigon power

station, Shell and Standard Oil depots, coal-mines...) At the same time, big peasants' demonstrations broke out in 25 provinces.

September 12, 1930:

— Nghe Tinh Soviet movement. After a savage repression by the colonial administration it died out in mid-1931.

A peasant insurrection broke out in Quang Ngai and many peasant demonstrations in Cochinchina (Sadec, Vinh Long, Soc Trang, etc.)

1935:

Big strikes in Saigon.

July 1936:

Decision of the ICP Central Committee on the founding of a broad people's anti-imperialist front and the launching of a vast campaign for the holding of an *Indochinese Congress*.

1936 - 1938:

A period of seething struggle by the Vietnamese working class, starting from the second half of 1936: workers' strikes in Saigon against the repression of the initiators of the *Indochinese Congress*, a strike of 25,000 workers of the Quang Yen coal-mine, etc.

March 1938:

Decision of the ICP Central Committee on the founding of an Indochinese Democratic United Front.

October 1938:

The ICP denounced France's and Britain's policy of compromise with the fascists and launched a campaign for the defence of Indochina against Japanese aggression.

November 1939:

Decision of the Sixth Plenum of the ICP Central Committee on the setting up of a united anti-imperialist front of the Indochinese peoples with a view to directing the spearhead of the revolutionary struggle against fascism.

June 1940:

French defeat in Europe.

September 27, 1940:

Bac Son insurrection.

November 23, 1940:

Nam Ky (Cochinchina) insurrection.

January 13, 1941:

Do Luong (Nghe An) uprising.

May 10, 1941:

Eighth Plenum of the ICP Central Committee presided over by Ho Chi Minh: it decided to boost preparations for an armed insurrection and found the Viet Minh front.

December 22, 1944:

Founding of the Propaganda and Liberation Army commanded by Vo Nguyen Giap.

March 9, 1945:

- The Japanese disarmed the French.
- The ICP Central Committee met in Hanoi to work out a series of resolutions of the utmost importance to push ahead the Vietnamese revolution.

After March 9, 1945:

Guerilla warfare extended in Tonkin and the northern provinces of Annam while famine took on terrible proportions, taking a toll of 2 million lives.

- Armed uprising in Ba To, Quang Ngai province (March 11).

April:

Merging of the revolutionary armed forces into a Liberation Army.

- Great revolutionary effervescence from North to South.

June :

Most of the territory of the six provinces north of the Red River (Lang Son, Cao Bang, Bac Can, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen) was liberated, constituting the main revolutionary base of the country.

August 13, 1945 :

- Capitulation of the Japanese. .
- An ICP National Congress launched these slogans : put an end to foreign aggression, win back national independence and set up people's power.

August 16, 1945 :

The Viet Minh convened a national congress which adopted a 10-point program.

August 17, 1945 :

- Big demonstration in favour of the Viet Minh in Hanoi.
- General strike.

August 19, 1945 :

- Huge demonstration of the Hanoi population.
- Resignation of the puppet government.
- Triumph of the revolution.

August 23, 1945 :

French intention to reconquer Viet Nam laid bare by parachuting of French officials in Nam Bo.

August 25, 1945:

- Abdication of Bao Dai.
- One million people in Saigon staged a demonstration which set up revolutionary power.

September 2, 1945:

- Presentation of the Insurrectional Provisional Government at Ba Dinh square.
- Proclamation of the Declaration of Independence by President Ho Chi Minh.
- During a mammoth demonstration for independence in Saigon, French colonialists fired at the crowd, killing or wounding 47 people.
- In early September, British and Indian troops landed in Saigon.

September 13, 1945:

British troops occupied the building of the Nam Bo Administrative Committee and authorized the French to relieve the Japanese in certain places in the city.

September 19, 1945:

The Nam Bo Administrative Committee called on the people to stand ready for armed resistance against French aggression.

September 21, 1945:

The British ordered a curfew in Saigon.

September 23, 1945:

French troops led by Leclerc landed in Saigon.

October 23, 1945:

The *Banque de l'Indochine* stopped all payments with the aim of provoking a financial crisis which would be disastrous for the people's power.

November 5, 1945:

President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Vietnamese people's determination to defend national independence at all costs.

November 25, 1945:

Directives of the ICP Central Committee on the resistance against aggression by French imperialism.

Late December 1945:

Lu Han, Commander of Chiang Kai-shek's troops in North Viet Nam sent the Vietnamese government an ultimatum demanding the resignation of the Communist ministers, the handing over of the leadership of the government to the nationalist reactionaries, the outright allotment to the latter of 80 seats in the National Assembly (before the elections), and the replacement of the national flag.

January 6, 1946:

General elections. The candidates of the Viet Minh, communists and patriots of all tendencies, were elected to the National Assembly with more than 95 per cent of the ballots cast.

In Nam Bo where the war was raging, more than 90 per cent of the electorate went to the polls.

January 31, 1946:

Issue of the *dong* (Vietnamese monetary unit).

February 28, 1946:

A Franco-Chinese treaty allowed French troops to relieve the Chiang Kai shek troops.

March 2, 1946:

First session of the National Assembly. Setting up of the legal Government of Viet Nam led by President Ho Chi Minh. Later on, a government decree instituted elected people's committees at various levels, which then elected an administrative committee for each locality.

March 6, 1946:

Franco-Vietnamese preliminary agreement: the French government recognized the Republic of Viet

Nam as a free State with its own government, parliament, army and finances, within the French Federation and French Union.

A few weeks later, in violation of the above-mentioned agreement, the French rigged up a "government of the Autonomous Republic of Nam Ky."

April 1946:

Preliminary talks between the Vietnamese and French delegations brought out fundamental differences between the positions of the two parties.

May 1946:

Setting up of the Lien Viet Front to achieve the broadest possible national union.

July 6, 1946:

Opening of Franco-Vietnamese negotiations at Fontainebleau. Yet the French government actively prepared for a war of reconquest.

October 1946:

The National Assembly met to entrust President Ho Chi Minh with the setting up of a new government on a broad national union basis. A Constitution was adopted.

November 20, 1946:

French attacks on Haiphong and Lang Son.

Bombardment of Haiphong by French artillery, causing thousands of dead.

December 17-18, 1946:

The French intensified provocations in Hanoi.

December 19, 1946:

In answer to a French ultimatum, President Ho Chi Minh called on the people to stand up against colonialist aggression. The war of resistance spread all over the country.

Compiled by TON LY

CORRIGENDUM

In our issue No. 21, "Traditional Viet Nam", page 91, the third line of the translation of Nguyen Binh Khiem's poem should read:

Like the fool that I am, I seek solitude,

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